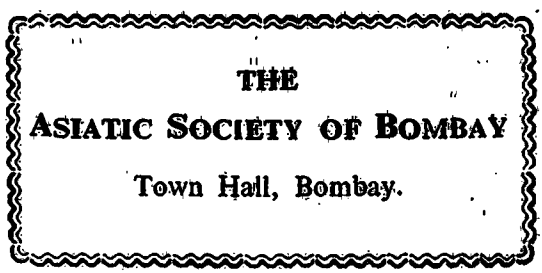

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Rossini

Drawn from a Sketch taken at Naples 1820.

THE

LIFE OF ROSSINI.

H. SUTHERLAND EDWARDS.

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LIFE OF ROSSINI.

INTRODUCTION.

Rossini was a very celebrated man fifty years ago. Forty-seven years ago he had already finished his Italian career. "Semiramide," the last opera he composed for Italy, was produced in 1823; and that same year the Abbé Carpani wrote the letters on which Stendhal founded, if not the best, at least the best known life of Rossini that has appeared.

Stendhal's Life of Rossini was given to the world, and found a ready acceptance, nearly half a century before Rossini's death. But it so happened, what his biographer could not have known at the time, that, in the year 1823, the composer of "Semiramide" had really completed an important, pro-

bably the most important, period of his artistic life. He began to write in the year 1808; and it was between the years 1813 ("Tancredi") and 1823 ("Semiramide") that he made his immense reputation.

During the next six years, from his visit to London in 1823 until the production of "William Tell" in 1829, he made his fortune, while continually adding to his reputation.

Finally he passed the third and comparatively inactive period of his life, from the year of "William Tell" until his death, in the tranquil enjoyment of his fortune and reputation, reminding the world from time to time, by the "Stabat Mater," by the three choruses, "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity," and by some charming compositions for voice and piano, that he was still the Rossini of former days; and proving by his last production that, even in extreme old age, he retained his glorious powers in all their fulness.

He composed a cantata when he was sixteen, and a mass when he was seventy-two. He began to write ten years before Donizetti, and nearly twenty years before Bellini; and he continued to write

when these, his immediate and most illustrious followers, were no more. It is clear, then, that in Rossini the Italian music of the nineteenth century is represented, and, as it were, comprised. Consider, in addition to this, the vast popularity of his best works, and the influence of his style on that of Herold, Auber, and Meyerbeer, and what can be more evident than that Rossini was the chief operatic composer of his time, not only as regards Italy but as regards all Europe?

The main incidents of Rossini's life are all connected directly or indirectly with music. As a youth, when Prince Eugene was Viceroy of Italy, he would have fallen a victim to the conscription but for the proofs he had already given of rare musical genius. When, at the age of 30, he took a wife, he married a singer for whom he had written some of his greatest parts. As a young man he was constantly travelling from one Italian city to another to superintend the production of his works. For the same reason he went to Vienna, just as his Italian career was coming to an end, and there met Beethoven. He never crossed the sea but

once, and then only the Straits of Dover, to pay an artistic visit to England; and he passed the latter portion of his life in the country to which he had given "William Tell," and which he had almost adopted as his own.

Rossini had no ambition apart from music, and was quite satisfied with being the first operatic composer of his epoch. He was observant, well informed, talked well on a great variety of subjects, and possessed the sort of cultivation which might have been expected from his long habit of association with eminent persons in all branches of art and of the highest social distinction.

With regard to his temperament, everyone has heard that when, writing in bed, he let fall the piece he was just finishing, he did not rise to pick it up, as a man of sluggish imagination would have done, but at once, with true musical activity, wrote another. He did not like the half-material bother of setting to work; but he was full of ideas, and, when he *did* begin, melody flowed from him as from an eternal spring. Some of his most beautiful thoughts came to him suddenly as if by inspiration. He conceived the *preghiera* in "Mosè" on seeing the

words, and wrote "Di tanti palpiti" while his dinner was being served. He was too delicately organised and had too much sense to love labour for the sake of labour; but he produced five operas in 1812 when he was preparing for "Tancredi;" he composed the "Barber of Seville" in thirteen days, and the "Barber of Seville," "Otello," "La Cenerentola," and "La Gazza Ladra" (not to speak of some minor works) in little more than a year. He wrote nothing operatic after the age of 37, but how he worked for the theatre until he was 30!

As to money, he had a just regard for it. But he was neither extravagant nor penurious; and when by working a few years in France he had secured a fortune which he never could have gained in any other country by the mere pursuit of his art, he gratefully abandoned his "author's rights" to the "Société des Compositeurs de Musique."

There was nothing dramatic in Rossini's life. From an obscure origin he rose in a very few years to be one of the most celebrated men in Europe; but this gave him no trouble. His success was immediate, like that of a beautiful woman, whose beauty every one can appreciate. He never met

with an obstacle of any importance, and his brilliant genius was never seriously or persistently denied.

Nevertheless, he made no undue concessions to the public taste, and he was a great innovator. In the course of ten years' very hard work he completely changed the system of Italian opera. Into opera seria he introduced the most valuable reforms; while for the farce of the old opera buffa he substituted the comedy style in which "Il Barbiere" and "La Cenerentola" are written.

It is a pity no musician has thought it worth while to write the artistic life of Rossini, showing fully and explicitly what modifications, developments, and new combinations in opera are due to him. Without venturing too far into technicalities, I have attempted something of the kind in this volume, which aims, however, at the character of a complete biography.

PART I.

ROSSINI AND HIS EARLY WORKS.

CHAPTER I.

ROSSINI'S YOUTH.

ALTHOUGH Rossini's artistic life did not number precisely the "three score and ten years" allotted to man, we must go back a full seventy years from the date of his last work to the first incident in his musical career. When, in 1709, Paer's "Camilla," written a few years before for Vienna, was brought out at Bologna, Rossini, then little more than an infant, took the part of the child. "Nothing," says Madame Giorgi-Righetti,* the original *Rosina* in the future composer's "Barber of Seville," "could be imagined more tender, more touching than the voice and action of this extraordinary child in the beautiful canon of the third act, 'Senti in si fiero istante.' The Bolognese of that time declared that he would some day be one of the greatest musicians

* Cenni di una donna gia contante sopra il maestro Rossini.

known. I need not say whether the prophecy has been verified."

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, born on the 29th of February, 1792, two months after the death of Mozart, was only seven years of age when he sustained a part in the work of a composer whose fame he was destined before long to eclipse. The child came of musical parentage, for his father held the office of trumpeter to the town of Pesaro, in the Romagna; while his mother, who possessed a very beautiful voice, was able, when the father fell into trouble, to support the family by singing on the stage.

It has been said that Rossini was of obscure origin, but this only applies to his immediate progenitors. In the year 1861, too late to be of much service to him, the "Album di Roma" published Rossini's pedigree, from which it appears that the great composer is a descendant of Giovanni, head of the family of Russini (or Rossini),* who "flourished" about the middle of the sixteenth century. Giovanni had two sons — Giovanno Francesco, direct an-

* If Miçkiewicz had known that the composer of the "Barber of Seville" was descended from the Russini, he would have claimed him as a Slavonian.

cestor of the composer, and Fabrizio, who was Governor of Ravenna, and died at Lugo in 1570. Next in the line comes Bastiano; then Antonio, born 9th of March, 1600; then Antonio, born the 16th February, 1637; then Antonio, born 7th September, 1667; then Giuseppe Antonio, born 1708; then Gioachino Sante, born 1739; and, finally, Giuseppe Antonio, the composer's father, born in 1764.

The arms of the Rossini family have also been published. They consist of three stars in the upper part of the escutcheon, and a hand holding a rose, surmounted by a nightingale in the lower part. Giovanni Russini, who "flourished" in the sixteenth century, must have adopted them in a prophetic spirit.

Giuseppe Rossini, the trumpeter, that is, herald and town crier to the sound of the trumpet, was a man of advanced political views, and seems to have entertained the same sympathy for the French which was afterwards manifested for that gallant and polite nation by his illustrious son. When the French army entered Pesaro in 1796, after the Italian campaign, the enthusiasm of old Rossini,

in spite of his official position, was so marked that on the withdrawal of the Republican troops he was first deprived of his place, and afterwards thrown into prison.

Then it was (1798) that Signora Rossini, who had been in the habit of accompanying her husband to fairs and other musical gatherings, and singing small parts on the stage, while he played the horn in the orchestra, obtained a regular engagement; and it was probably under her auspices that the child Rossini made his first appearance in public.

This much, however, is certain, that Rossini, while still very young, joined his parents in their musical excursions, and took the second horn in the orchestras where the part of first horn was assigned to his father. No wonder that in after life he had an affection for wind instruments!

When young Rossini was twelve years old, he was taken to Bologna to see Professor Tesei of that city, who was much pleased with the little boy, gave him lessons in singing and pianoforte playing, and put him in the way of earning money by singing solos in the churches. At the end of two years he could execute the most difficult music at

first sight, and was able to act as musical director to a travelling company, which gave performances at Lugo, Ferrari, Forli, Sinigaglia, and other little towns in the Romagna. In 1807 he returned to Bologna, and was admitted to the Lyceum, where he studied composition under Father Mattei with so much success, that in the following year he was chosen to write the cantata which was expected annually from the Lyceum's best pupil.

"Pianto d'Armonia per la Morte d'Orfeo" was the subject of this, Rossini's first work, written when he was sixteen years of age, and executed at Bologna in August, 1808.

The success of the cantata was such that it procured for its composer the appointment of director of the Philharmonic concerts, in which capacity he superintended the production of Haydn's "Seasons." He had previously got up a performance of the "Creation" in the Lyceum itself; and it is interesting to know that at this period Rossini devoted himself ardently to the study of Haydn's symphonies and quartets.

While on the subject of Rossini's early studies it would be wrong to forget his eccentric pianoforte

professor, Prinetti, who had two remarkable peculiarities: he never went to bed, and he taught his pupils to play the scales with two fingers, the first finger and the thumb. Pianoforte music "for four hands" is common enough; but pianoforte music for two fingers was probably never heard of except in connexion with Prinetti and his scales.

In 1809 Rossini produced a symphony and a quartet, and in the year following made his *début* as a composer for the stage. The Marquis Cavalli, impresario of the theatre of Sinigaglia, where Rossini had officiated as musical conductor, was also director of the San Mosè* theatre at Venice, and invited the young composer to write an opera for the latter establishment. This, the first work addressed by Rossini to the general public, was a trifle in one act, called "La Cambiale di Matrimonio." It was produced in 1810, and Rossini received about eight pounds for it.

The opera or operetta of "La Cambiale di Matrimonio" was followed by the cantata of "Didone

* The Italian theatres are for the most part named after the parishes in which they stand.

Abbandonata," which Rossini composed for a relation, the afterwards celebrated Esther Mombelli, in 1811.

He produced the same year, also at Bologna, an opera buffa in two acts, called "L'Equivoco Stravagante." This work, of which not even fragments have been preserved, seems nevertheless to have been thoroughly successful. One of Rossini's very earliest productions, it was probably written, less in what we now consider his own particular style, than in that of his immediate predecessors. The concerted pieces, however, were much remarked, as was also a final rondo for the prima donna, Madame Marcolini. The rondo is especially noticeable as the first of those final airs for which Rossini seemed to have a particular liking, until he produced the most brilliant specimen of the style in the "Non piu Mesta" of "Cenerentola"—and then abandoned it to the after-cultivation of other composers.

"L'Inganno Felice," written in 1812 for Venice, is the first of Rossini's operas which, many years after its production, was thought worthy of revival. It was played at Paris in 1819, and some years later at Vienna, where the illustrious Barbaja, for

whom Rossini wrote so many fine works, at Naples, between the years 1814 and 1823, brought it out.

After the success of "L'Inganno Felice" at Venice, Rossini was invited to write an oratorio for the Teatro Communale of Ferrara. The result was "Ciro in Babilonia," produced at the beginning of Lent, 1812. Madame Marcolini, the prima donna of the "Equivoco Stravagante," played a principal part in this work, which, as a whole, was not very successful. Rossini saved from the remains of "Ciro," a chorus which he introduced into "Aureliano in Palmira" (and from which he afterwards borrowed the beautiful theme of *Almaviva's* air, "Ecco ridente il Cielo," in "Il Barbiere"), and a concerted finale which re-appeared, in the year 1827, in the French version of "Mosè in Egitto."

One would like, as a curiosity, to hear the air Rossini wrote in this opera of "Ciro" for the seconda donna. The poor woman, as Rossini himself told Ferdinand Hiller, had only one good note in her voice, and he accordingly made her repeat that note and no other, while the melody of her solo was played by the orchestra.

In addition to the two works just mentioned,

Rossini wrote "La Pietra del Paragone," for Milan, and two one act operettas, "La Scala di Seta" and "L' occasione fa il ladro," for Venice, in this fertile year of 1812.

"La Pietra del Paragone" contained leading parts for Galli, the afterwards celebrated basso, and Madame Marcolini, who, as in the "Equivoco Stravagante," was furnished with a brilliant and very successful final rondo.

The libretto of "La Pietra" is based on an idea not absolutely new, and which, for that very reason perhaps, is generally successful on the stage. Count Asdrubal, a rich and inquisitive man, wishes to know whether his friends and a certain young lady, the heroine of the piece, are attracted to him by his wealth or really esteem and love him for his own sake. To decide the question he causes a bill for an immense sum drawn in favour of a Turk (the Turk was a great operatic character in those days) to be presented at his house. He himself, in Turkish costume, appears to receive the money, which the steward, having been instructed to recognise the signature as that of the Count's father, duly pays.

Some of the friends bear the test, others prove insincere. As for the young lady she comes out in the most brilliant colours. Too timid and too scrupulous before the appearance of the Turk to manifest in an unmistakeable manner the love she really feels for Count Asdrubal, she has now to force the count to make a declaration to *her*. For this purpose she finds it necessary to appear before him in the uniform of a captain of hussars; in which becoming costume Madame Marcolini sang her final rondo, saluting the public with her sabre in acknowledgment of their reiterated applause.

A still more successful piece in "La Pietra del Paragone" was the finale to the first act, known as "La Sigillara," in which the sham Turk insists that seals shall be placed on all Count Asdrubal's property.

It was the destiny of this work to be demolished, that its materials might be used for building up "Cenerentola," in which the air "Miei rampolli," the duet "Un soave non so che," the drinking chorus, and the baron's burlesque proclamation, all belonged originally to "La Pietra del Paragone."

Indeed the air now known as "Miei rampolli," before finding its last resting-place in "Cinderella," figured first in "La Pietra del Paragone," and afterwards in "La Gazzetta," a little opera of the year 1816.

The success of "La Pietra del Paragone" was an event in Rossini's life; for just after its production the young composer, then twenty years of age, was claimed by the army. He had a narrow escape of making the Russian campaign; and though Paisiello and Cimarosa had both been to Russia with profit to themselves, it is doubtful whether Rossini, undertaking the journey under quite different circumstances, would have derived from it the same advantages. Fortunately Prince Eugene, the Viceroy of Italy—not the only one of Napoleon's generals who, like Napoleon himself, had a cultivated taste for music—could appreciate the merit of "La Pietra del Paragone;" and, in the interest of art, exempted him from the perils of war. If Rossini had fallen due in 1811, before he had written either "La Pietra del Paragone" or L' Inganno Felice," the conscription would have taken him. Napoleon

would have gained one soldier more, and the world would have lost the "Barber of Seville" and "William Tell."

Of the two operettas written for the San Mosè of Venice in the year 1812 nothing need be said, except that the music of the second, "L' occasione fa il ladro," was presented at Paris, in a new shape, and under rather remarkable circumstances, only ten years ago.

An Italian poet, M. Berettoni, determined that so much good work should not be lost, added to it some pieces from "La Pietra del Paragone" and "Aureliano in Palmira," and arranged the whole in a new dramatic form. "Un Curioso Accidente" was the title given to this pasticcio in two acts, which was announced as a new Opera by Rossini.

Rossini, who is supposed to have been so entirely careless of his reputation, did not choose that a production made up of pieces extracted from the works of his youth, and put together without his sanction, should be announced as a new and complete work from his pen; and lost no time in addressing to M. Calzado the following letter:—

"*November* 11, 1859.

"SIR,—I am told that the bills of your theatre announce a new Opera by me under this title, 'Un Curioso Accidente.'

"I do not know whether I have the right to prevent the representation of a production in two acts (more or less) made up of old pieces of mine; I have never occupied myself with questions of this kind in regard to my works (not one of which, by the way, is named 'Un Curioso Accidente'). In any case I have not objected to and I do not object to the representation of this 'Curioso Accidente.' But I cannot allow the public invited to your theatre, and your subscribers, to think either that it is a *new* Opera by me, or that I took any part in arranging it.

"I must beg of you then to remove from your bills the word *new*, together with my name as author, and to substitute instead the following:—'Opera, consisting of pieces by M. Rossini, arranged by M. Berettoni.'

"I request that this alteration may appear in the bills of to-morrow, in default of which I shall be

obliged to ask from justice what I now ask from your good faith.

"Accept my sincere compliments.

"Signed,

"GIOACHINO ROSSINI."

The effect of this letter was to cause the entire disappearance of "Un Curioso Accidente," which was not heard of again. At the one representation which took place a charming trio in the buffo style, for men's voices, taken from the "Pietra del Paragone," and a very pretty duet for soprano and contralto from "Aureliano in Palmira," were remarked.

In addition to the five works already mentioned as having been written by Rossini during the year 1812, "Demetrio e Polibio" may be mentioned as belonging to that year by its production on the stage, if not by its composition.

"Demetrio e Polibio" was Rossini's first opera. He wrote it in the spring of 1809, when he was just seventeen years of age, but is said to have re-touched it before its representation at Rome in the year 1812.

"Demetrio e Polibio" seems to have been alto-

gether a family affair. The libretto was written by Madame Mombelli. Her husband, Mombelli, a tenor of experience, has the credit of having suggested to Rossini, from among his copious reminiscences, some notions for melodies. The daughters, Marianna and Esther, played two of the principal parts, while the third was taken by the basso, Olivieri, a very intimate friend of the family, of which Rossini himself was a relative.

An officer whom Stendhal met at Como one night when "Demetrio e Polibio" was about to be played, furnished him with this interesting account of the Mombellis, which tallies closely enough with the description of them given some forty years afterwards by Rossini himself to Ferdinand Hiller.

"The company," he said, "consists of a single family. Of the two daughters, one who is always dressed as a man takes the parts of the musico (or sopranist); that is Marianna. The other one, Esther, who has a voice of greater extent though less even, less perfectly sweet, is the prima donna. In 'Demetrio e Polibio' the old Mombelli, who was once a celebrated tenor, takes the part of the *King*. That of the chief of the conspirators will be

filled by a person called Olivieri, who has long been attached to Madame Mombelli, the mother, and who, to be useful to the family, takes utility parts on the stage, and in the house is cook and major domo. Without being pretty, the Mombellis have pleasing faces. But they are ferociously virtuous, and it is supposed that the father, who is an ambitious man, wishes to get them married."

The year 1813 was a much greater year for Rossini than that of 1812, already sufficiently promising. The latter was the year of "L' Inganno Felice" and "La Pietra del Paragone;" the former that of "Tancredi" and "L' Italiana in Algeri."

Rossini's first work of the batch of three brought out in 1813 was a trifle, but owing to peculiar circumstances, a very amusing trifle, called "Il Figlio per Azzardo." This operetta, or *farza*, was written for the San Mosè theatre, and was the last work furnished by Rossini to that establishment.

The manager of the San Mosè was annoyed at Rossini's having engaged to write for another Venetian theatre, the Fenice, and in consequence treated him with great incivility, for which the young composer determined to have his revenge.

He had moreover deliberately, and of malice prepense, given Rossini a libretto so monstrously absurd that to make it the groundwork of even a tolerable opera was impossible; yet Rossini was bound by his engagement to set it to music or pay damages. He resolved to set it to music.

If the libretto was absurd, the music which Rossini composed to it was ludicrous, grotesque, extravagant to the last degree of caricature. The bass had to sing at the top of his voice, and only the very lowest notes of the prima donna were called into requisition. One singer, whose appearance was always a signal for laughter, had to deliver a fine-drawn sentimental melody. Another artist who could not sing at all had a very difficult air assigned to him, which, that none of his faults might pass unperceived, was accompanied *pianissimo* by a *pizzicato* of violins. In short, it was an anticipation of Offenbach, and it is astonishing that this musical burlesque of Rossini's has never been reproduced substantially, or by imitation (it is scarcely probable that the original score was preserved), at the Bouffes Parisiens.

Nor must the orchestra be forgotten, which

Rossini enriched on this occasion by the introduction of instruments previously unknown. In one movement the musicians, at the beginning of each bar, had to strike the tin shades of the candles in front of them; when the sound extracted from these new "instruments of percussion," instead of pleasing the public, so irritated it, that the audacious innovator, hissed and hooted by his audience, found it prudent to make his escape from the theatre.

This practical joke in music was one which few composers could have afforded to make; but Rossini had to choose between a bad joke and a bad opera, and he preferred the former.

CHAPTER II.

ITALIAN OPERA UNTIL "TANCREDI."

THE first opera of Rossini's which became celebrated throughout Europe was "Tancredi," which in the present day seems just a little old-fashioned. In regard to the recitatives and their accompaniments "Tancredi" is indeed somewhat antiquated. But it was new, strikingly new, in the year 1813, when Mozart's great operas had scarcely been heard out of Germany, and when, moreover, no one thought of comparing Rossini's works with any but works by other Italian composers. It was very unlike the serious operas of Rossini's Italian predecessors, and, in the opinion of many who admired those operas even to prejudice, was full of culpable innovations.

When Rossini began to write for the stage, the lyric drama of Italy was divided by a hard line

into the serious and the comic; and comic opera, or rather opera buffa, was, musically speaking, in a much more advanced state of development than opera seria. The dialogue, especially in serious opera, was carried on for interminable periods in recitative. Choruses were rarely introduced; and concerted pieces, though by no means unknown, were still reserved, as a rule, for the conclusion of an act.

The singers were allowed great liberty of adornment, and treated the composer's melodies as so much musical canvas, to be embroidered upon at will.

The orchestra was in a very subordinate position; the harmony was meagre, the instrumentation mild—many instruments, that were afterwards employed prominently and with great effect by Rossini, being kept in the background or entirely ignored.

Clarinets, for instance, were only admitted into Italian orchestras on condition of being kept quiet; while bassoons were used only to strengthen the basses. Brass instruments, with the exception of horns, were all but proscribed; and some of

the brass instruments used by all composers in the present day—opheicleids, for instance, cornets, and all the family of saxhorns—were unknown.

Rossini did not stop, in the way of orchestrations, at "Tancredi;" and the drums and trumpets of the "Gazza Ladra" overture, the military band of "Semiramide," the sackbuts, psalteries, and all kinds of musical instruments employed in his operas for the French stage, shocked the early admirers of "Tancredi" as much as the innovations, vocal and instrumental, in "Tancredi" had shocked those who cared only for the much simpler works of Paisiello and Cimarosa. Thus we find Stendhal complaining that in "Otello," "Zelmira," and above all "Semiramide," Rossini, in the matter of orchestration, had ceased to be an Italian, and had become a German—which, in the opinion of Stendhal and his Italian friends, was about as severe a thing as could be said.

Lord Mount Edgcumbe in his "Reminiscences of the Opera" gives a fair account of the reforms introduced by Rossini into the operatic music of Italy, which is interesting as proceeding from an old

operatic habitué to whom these changes were anything but acceptable. It would be a mistake to suppose that Rossini's operas encountered formidable opposition anywhere; and in England, as in France, those musicians and amateurs who, here and there, made it their business to decry them, did so with the more energy on account of the immense favour with which they were received by the general public.

"So great a change," says Lord Mount Edgcumbe, "has taken place in the character of the (operatic) dramas, in the style of the music and its performance, that I cannot help enlarging on that subject before I proceed further. One of the most material alterations is that the grand distinction between serious and comic operas is nearly at an end, the separation of the singers for their performance entirely so.* Not only do the same sing in both, but a new species of drama has arisen, a kind

* The serious opera consisted of the following persons: The *soprano* or *primo uomo* [*homo*, but not *vir*], prima donna (generally a *mezzo soprano* or *contralto*) and tenor; the *secondo uomo* (soprano) *seconda donna* and *ultima parte* (bass). The company for the comic opera consisted of the *primo buffo* (tenor) *prima buffa*, *buffo caricato* (bass), *seconda buffa* and *ultima parte* (bass). There were also the *uomo serio* and *donna seria*, generally the second man or woman of the serious opera.

of mongrel between them called *semi seria*, which bears the same analogy to the other two that that nondescript, melodrama, does to the legitimate drama and comedy of the English."

Specimens of this "nondescript" style are of course to be found in Shakspeare's plays and in Mozart's operas; but let Lord Mount Edgcumbe continue his perfectly intelligible account of Rossini's reforms.

"The construction of these newly invented pieces," he proceeds, "is essentially different from the old. The dialogue, which used to be carried on in recitative, and which in Metastasio's operas is often so beautiful and interesting, is now cut up (and rendered unintelligible if it were worth listening to) into *pezzi concertati*, or long singing conversations, which present a tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing *motivos* having nothing to do with each other: and if a satisfactory air is for a moment introduced which the ear would like to dwell upon, to hear modulated, varied, and again returned to, it is broken off before it is well understood, by a sudden transition into a totally different melody, time and key, and recurs no more; so that

no impression can be made or recollection of it preserved. Single songs are almost exploded . . . even the prima donna, who would formerly have complained at having less than three or four airs allotted to her, is now satisfied with one trifling cavatina for a whole opera."

Rossini's concerted pieces and finales described are not precisely a "tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing motivos;" but from his own point of view Lord Mount Edgcumbe's account of Rossini's innovations is true enough.

It seems strange, that in the year 1813, when Rossini produced "Tancredi," the mere forms of the lyric drama should have still been looked upon as unsettled. For though opera could only boast a history of two centuries—little enough considering the high antiquity of the spoken drama—it had made great progress during the previous hundred years, and was scarcely the same entertainment as that which popes, cardinals, and the most illustrious nobles in Italy had taken under their special protection in the early part of the seventeenth century. No general history of the opera in Europe can well be written, for its progress has been different in each

country, and we find continual instances of composers leaving one country to visit and even to settle in another, taking with them their works, and introducing at the same time and naturalising their style. But its development in Italy can be followed, more or less closely, from its origin in a long series of experiments to the time of Scarlatti, and from Scarlatti (1649) in an unbroken line to Rossini.

Indeed, from Scarlatti to the immediate predecessors of Rossini, the history of the development of the opera in Italy is the history of its development at Naples; and Rossini himself, though not educated at Naples, like almost all the other leading composers of Italy, soon betook himself to the great musical capital, and composed for its celebrated theatre all his best Italian operas in the serious style.

Without proposing to imitate those conscientious historians who cannot chronicle the simplest events of their own time without going back to the origin of all things, I may perhaps find it more easy to explain to the unlearned reader what Rossini did in the way of perfecting operatic forms if I pre-

viously mark down the steps in advance taken by his predecessors.

The first operas seem to have been little more than spoken dramas interspersed with choruses in the madrigal style. "Dafne," performed for the first time in the Corsi palace in 1597, passes for the first *opera musicale* in which recitative was employed.

In "Euridice," represented publicly at Florence on the occasion of the marriage of Henry IV. of France with Marie de Medicis in 1600, each of the five acts concludes with a chorus, the dialogue is in recitative, and one of the characters, *Tircis*, sings an air which is introduced by an instrumental prelude. Here, then, in germ, are the overture, the chorus, the air, the recitative of modern opera.

Monteverde (1568—1643), who changed the whole harmonic system of his predecessors, gave greater importance in his operas to the accompaniments, increased the number of musicians in the orchestra, and made use of a separate combination of instruments to announce the entry and

return of each dramatic personage—an orchestral device which passes in the present day for new.

Scarlatti (1649—1745), who studied in Rome under Carissimi, gave new development to the operatic air, and introduced measured recitative. Scarlatti's operas contain the earliest examples of airs with *obbligato* solo accompaniments, and this composer must always hold an important place in the history of the opera as the founder of the great Neapolitan school.

Alessandro Scarlatti was followed by Logroscino and Durante;* the former of whom introduced concerted pieces and the dramatic finale, which was afterwards developed by Piccinni, and introduced into serious opera by Paisiello; while the latter succeeded his old master, contemporaneously with Leo, as professor at Naples, where Jomelli, Piccinni, Sacchini, Guglielmi, Paisiello, and Cimarosa, were formed under his guidance.

The special innovations of Piccinni and Paisiello have been mentioned. Cimarosa, without inventing or modifying any particular form, wrote the best

* Durante passed from one Conservatory at Naples to another, and was necessarily professor at all three.

overtures that the Italian school had yet produced, and was the first to introduce concerted pieces in the midst of dramatic action.

We have seen that Rossini was a pupil of the Bologna Lyceum; but though he was the first great Italian composer who never studied at the Conservatories of Naples, to him fell all the rich inheritance of the Neapolitan school.

CHAPTER III.

FOUR HISTORICAL OPERAS.

In bringing forward Monteverde, Scarlatti, Durante, Logroscino, and Pergolese, Jomelli, Piccinni, Paisiello, and Cimarosa, as the founders of opera, one seems to be tracing operatic history merely through names. To opera goers, who do not limit the sphere of their observation to London, it would be simpler to cite four examples of works belonging to the century before Rossini, which, if not living in the full sense of the word, are, at least, capable of revival, and have been presented to the public in their revived state during the last few years.

Pergolese's "Serva Padrona," an opera or operetta of the year 1731, was reproduced at Paris in 1862, for the *début* of Madame Galli-Marié. In this little work, which passed for its composer's masterpiece, the accompaniments are all for stringed

instruments, and as there are only two speaking characters in the drama, it naturally follows that all the musical pieces are of the simplest form. But when "La Serva Padrona" was produced, a composer, however many characters he might have to deal with, was not expected to go in the way of concerted pieces beyond a duet; and it was not until twenty years afterwards that Logroscino ventured upon a trio, and upon the first very simple model of the dramatic finale.

In Gluck's "Orfeo" we have a well-known specimen of an opera, somewhat later in date, and much more advanced in regard to dramatic form, than the one just named. It must be remembered that "Orfeo" was originally produced in 1764, not in France, but in Italy. In Gluck's operas we find an abundance of recitative; airs; choruses taking part in the dramatic action; occasionally duets; very rarely concerted pieces, and never finales. Gluck, like his rival Piccinni, but certainly not more than Piccinni, extended the limits of operatic art. If, as is generally admitted, he excelled in his dramatic treatment of chorus and orchestra, he neglected

concerted pieces, and was not equal to the handling of those grand dramatic finales which Piccinni was the first to produce, in anything like their modern form, which Paisiello naturalised in serious opera, and which were brought to perfection in both styles by the comprehensive genius of Mozart.

A third opera by a præ-Mozartian composer, which, as it is still occasionally represented, may be cited for the further progress it exhibits in the development of operatic forms, is Cimarosa's "Matrimonio Segretto." Before writing this, one of his latest works (1792), its composer had been already completely distanced by Mozart, who adopted all that was worth adopting in the methods of all his contemporaries and predecessors; but to Cimarosa all the same belongs the merit of having introduced quartets and other concerted pieces, not as ornaments at the end of an act, but as integral parts of the musical drama. This important innovation occurs for the first time in Cimarosa's "Il fanatico per le antichi Romani," composed in 1773, thirteen years before the production of the "Marriage of Figaro."

Cimarosa's "Matrimonio Segretto" is also remarkable in an historical point of view for its overture, the finest that the Italian school had up to that time produced. Paisiello's overture to the "Frascatana" had previously made a decided mark; but Rossini was the first composer of his nation who wrote a whole series of operatic overtures—"Tancredi," "Barber of Seville," "Gazza Ladra," "Semiramide," "Siege of Corinth," "William Tell"—which became celebrated apart from the works to which they are prefixed.

The only opera of Paisiello's which has been presented in recent times, is his original musical setting of the "Barber of Seville," written in 1780 for the Court Theatre at St. Petersburgh. This interesting work, which was revived a couple of years ago, and is still occasionally played at one of the half dozen musical theatres in Paris called Les Fantaisies Parisiennes, is anterior to Mozart, more even in character than by date. Produced twenty years before "Il Matrimonio Segretto," and only six years before the "Marriage of Figaro," it seems very much further removed from Mozart's than

from Cimarosa's work. Mozart went so far beyond his contemporaries that he may almost be described as a great anticipator. Like Shakspeare he is much more modern than his immediate successors.

However Paisiello's "Barbiere" may sometimes be heard, and is therefore better worth speaking of than works of equal or greater importance, which can only be looked at on paper; and it is interesting as marking a stage in the history of opera by the number and merit of its concerted pieces.

The opera, then, was at first nothing but recitative, or recitative and chorus; the chorus having no dramatic character, but confining itself, in imitation of the most ancient models, to solemn criticism and comment. To relieve the drawling recitative or chant, an occasional air was introduced; then more airs; then airs and duets. We have to wait until the middle of the eighteenth century for a simple trio. Then trios, quartets, finales, fully developed finales, occur. In the meantime Gluck had given great prominence to the chorus, and had cultivated choral writing with the happiest dramatic effect; and while operatic forms, especially in regard to

the employment of the voices, had been gradually varied and extended by the Italians, the instrumental writers of Germany, more especially Haydn, had invented new orchestral combinations. Mozart appeared; and appropriating all in music that had gone before—joining to all the vocal forms of the Italians all the instrumental forms of the Germans, while improving, developing, and perfecting both—helped dramatic music on to that point at which even now, speaking broadly, it may be said to remain.

CHAPTER IV.

MOZART AND ROSSINI.

NEW instruments have been introduced since Mozart's time. It has become the fashion still further to shorten recitatives; the chorus has been made more prominent than ever in Italian Opera, and Verdi gives it flowing melodies to sing as to a soloist of fifty-voice power. Nevertheless, in all essentials, no progress in the composition of dramatic music has been made since "Don Giovanni;" and if Mozart's operas had been known in Italy when Rossini began to write, then, instead of saying that Rossini took this idea from Cimarosa and from Paisiello, that from Gluck, that from Haydn, it would be much simpler to say that he took all that was new in the construction of his works from Mozart.

Rossini could scarcely have studied Mozart's works—certainly not their effect on the stage—

when, in 1813, he produced "Tancredi;" in fact, "Tancredi" presents much less modern forms than the "Marriage of Figaro" and "Don Giovanni," written a quarter of a century earlier. But it must be remembered that Rossini did not perfect his style until about 1816, the year of "Otello" and of the "Barber of Seville;" and in the meanwhile La Scala had represented "Don Giovanni" (1814), and with much greater success "Le Nozze di Figaro" (1815).

Mozart may have prepared the way for Rossini's European success, and Rossini certainly profited in a direct manner by all Mozart's reforms in the lyric drama. Still he may be said to have arrived independently of Mozart's influence at many of Mozart's results. Even in what passes specially for a reform introduced by Rossini, the practice of writing airs, ornaments, and all, precisely as they are to be sung, Rossini had been anticipated by Mozart, by Gluck, by Handel, by all the German composers. Nevertheless, it was not in deliberate imitation of the more exact composers of Germany, it was for the sake of his own music that Rossini made this important innovation, which no composer has since departed from.

Out of Germany Mozart's operas only became known a very short time before those of Rossini. Mozart was at once appreciated by the Bohemians of Prague, but his success was contested by the Germans of Vienna, and it may be said with only too much truth that his masterpieces met with no general recognition until after his death. Joseph II. cared only for Italian music, and never gave his entire approbation to anything Mozart produced, though some of the best musicians of the period, with Haydn and Cimarosa at their head, acknowledged him to be the greatest composer in Europe.

The Emperor thought there were "too many notes" in the "Entführung aus dem Serail," in spite of Mozart's assurance that there were "precisely the proper number." The "Marriage of Figaro," not much esteemed by the Court, was hissed by the Viennese public on its first production; while "Don Giovanni" itself, in spite of its success at Prague, was quite eclipsed at Vienna by the "Assur" of Salieri. Cimarosa in the meanwhile was idolised at Court. The Emperor Leopold, at the first representation of "Matrimonio Segretto," encored the whole work, and loaded the composer with honours

and riches; but he never really appreciated Mozart's works.

The influence of a clique of hostile Italian musicians living at Vienna, also, no doubt, counted for something. In taking an important part in the establishment of German Opera, Mozart threatened to diminish the reputation of the Italian school. The "Entführung aus dem Serail" was the first blow to the supremacy of Italian Opera; "Der Schauspiel-direktor" was the second; and when, after the production of this latter work at the New German Theatre of Vienna, Mozart proceeded to write the "Nozze di Figaro" for the Italians, he simply placed himself in the hands of his enemies.

It cannot be said that in Italy Mozart's recognition was delayed by mere national prejudice; but his works presented great executive difficulties; many of the pieces were too complex for the Italian taste, while in others too much importance was assigned to the orchestra, too little to the voices. Mozart, moreover, was not in the country to propose and superintend the production of his works, and the Italian composers, his contemporaries, thought,

no doubt, that they did enough in getting their own brought out.

Ultimately it was through Italian singers that both "Don Giovanni" and "Le Nozze di Figaro" became known throughout Europe; but Mozart's two great operas, though written fully thirty years before Rossini's best works, were not introduced in Italy, France, and England, until about the same time. It took Mozart upwards of a quarter of a century to make the journey from Vienna to London; whereas Rossini, from Rome and Naples, reached both London and Paris in three or four years.

CHAPTER V.

ROSSINI'S REFORMS IN SERIOUS OPERA.

We have seen that when Rossini's "Tancredi" was first brought out in London, Lord Mount-Edgcumbe did not know what to make of it, and thought Italian Opera was coming to an end; whereas, as far as that generation was concerned, it was only just beginning. "Tancredi" has, in the present day, somewhat of an old-fashioned, or rather, let us say, antique character. Many of the melodic phrases, by dint of fifty years' wear, have lost their primitive freshness; and they are often decorated in a style which, good or bad, does not suit the taste of the present day. But it marks the commencement of the reforms introduced by Rossini into opera seria, and it is the first work by which he became known abroad. A very few years after its first production at Venice, "Tancredi" was played all over Europe.

To most opera goers of the present day, the recitatives of "Tancredi" will appear sufficiently long—they are interminable compared with the brief recitatives by which Verdi connects his pieces. But before the time of "Tancredi," dialogue in recitative may be said to have formed the ground-work and substance of opera; and many an opera seria consisted almost entirely of recitative broken here and there by airs for a single voice. The opera buffa was richer in concerted music; and Rossini, speaking broadly, introduced the forms of opera buffa into opera seria. For much declamation he substituted singing; for endless monologues and duologues, ensembles connected and supported by a brilliant orchestra. The bass singer was still kept somewhat in the background. But he had a part; his personality was recognised; and some of the amateurs of the old school pointed to him in "Tancredi" with prophetic eye, and sadly foretold that, having been allowed to make his first step, he would be gradually brought forward until, at last, he would stand prominently in the front—as he in fact did a very few years afterwards in Rossini's "Mosè."

Before "Tancredi" the bass took no part in tragic

opera. Then, in addition to the new distribution of parts, the new arrangement of the dramatic scenes, the elaborate finale, the bright sonorous instrumentation, there were the charming melodies, there was the animation of the style, which, whatever the plan of the work, would certainly have sufficed to ensure it a large measure of success. All who heard the opera must, consciously or unconsciously, have felt the effect of Rossini's admirable innovations; but what chiefly excited the enthusiasm of the public was the beauty of the melodies. All Venice sang the airs from "Tancredi," the gondoliers made them into serenades; Rossini was followed by them wherever he went. It is said that they used even to be introduced in the law courts, and that the judges had more than once to stop the humming of "mi rivedrai, te revedro." "I thought when they heard my opera," said Rossini, "that the Venetians would think me mad. But I found that they were much madder than I was."

It was indeed with some fear and trepidation that Rossini witnessed the preparations for the first performance of "Tancredi." He had not met the

Venetian public since that affair of the lamp-shade accompaniment, into the humour of which they had positively refused to enter; and it was not at all certain that by way of a practical joke on their side, they would not hiss a work which the composer meant this time to be enthusiastically applauded. The manager of the Mosè, moreover, was now an enemy of Rossini, and, independently of that, would certainly not be sorry to hear of a failure at the "other house." The Fenice, then, was full, the musicians of the orchestra were at their posts, the time for commencing the overture had arrived, and still Rossini was nowhere to be found.

It was at that time the custom in Italy for the composer of a new opera to preside at its representation three successive times; but Rossini seemed determined to escape at least one of these trial performances.

However, he intended the overture as a sort of peace-offering. It was begun in his absence under the leadership of the first violin; and the first allegro was so much applauded that Rossini at once felt justified in leaving his hiding place by the

entrance to the orchestra and taking his seat on the conductor's chair. The crescendo, a means not invented by Rossini, but employed by him more persistently and with more success, than by any other composer, produced an effect which was repeated again and again in subsequent works, and never once too often. In fact, the whole of the animated and rather joyous prelude to what, if not a very serious opera, is at least an opera on a very serious subject, was received with expressions of delight.

No operatic overture was at one time more popular than that of "Tancredi." Perhaps it is our fault as much as that of the music, if it appears a little old-fashioned now. Certainly it is trivial in character. It does not fill the mind with thoughts and visions of noble deeds; nor does it present the slightest picture of the crusades as a modern programme-overture (with the aid of the programme) might do. But it caused the Venetians to forget the affair of the lamp-shade accompaniment; it predisposed them to enjoy the melodic beauties of which "Tancredi" is full; and, reduced for the piano-forte, it became, during only

too long a period, an effective show-piece for young ladies.

The crescendo, which pleased the audience in the overture, must have delighted them in the concerted finale, where it is reproduced on a more extended scale. This effect is said to have been suggested to Rossini by a similar one in Paisiello's "Re Teodoro." But the great maker of crescendo movements before Rossini was Mosca, who circulated numerous copies of one of his pieces containing crescendo effects, by way of proving his exclusive right to manufacture them. He was very indignant with Rossini for interfering with what he had accustomed himself to regard as his own private monopoly, and always declared that he, Mosca, was the true author of Rossini's celebrated crescendi.

Considering the very delicate relations subsisting between Rossini and the Venetian public, it must somewhat have alarmed him, when, the day before "Tancredi" was to be produced, he found that Madame Malanotte, the representative of the young hero, was dissatisfied with her first air.

Probably Madame Malanotte was difficult to please.

At all events, it was necessary to please her; and Rossini went away from the theatre wondering what he could improvise for her in place of the cavatina she had rejected.

He went home to dinner—even the composer who has, at a moment's notice, to satisfy the caprices of a prima donna, must dine—and told his servant to "prepare the rice;" fried rice being the Venetian substitute for macaroni, oysters, soup, no matter what first dish. During the few minutes necessary for frying and serving the rice, Rossini had begun to note down an air. The beautiful melody afterwards known as "Di tanti palpiti" had occurred to him; and this he had made the principal subject of the air to be sung by the fortunate Madame Malanotte on making her entry. The whole of the cavatina is beautiful; and if, as Stendhal says, the air of the allegro was borrowed by Rossini from a Greek hymn (Lord Mount Edgcumbe says that it is taken from some Roman Catholic service), then we ought to be very glad that Rossini *did* borrow it.

But no one who has ever heard the very primitive music of the Greek church will believe

that the melody of "Di tanti palpiti" formed any part of it—certainly not in its present shape and setting. Berlioz is said to have admired the music of the Russian church; but then the Russians admired the music of Berlioz, and it is doubtful whether Berlioz admired "Di tanti palpiti."

"It is said at Venice," writes Stendhal, "that the first idea of this delicious cantilena, which expresses so well the joy of meeting after a long absence, is taken from a Greek litany; Rossini had heard it sung a few days before at vespers in the church of one of the little islands of the lagoons of Venice." *

"Aria dei rizi," however, was the name popularly given to it; and wherever the first idea came from, the melody, as it now exists, is eminently Rossinian in form and style. How many great singers have sung this lovely air, beginning with the celebrated Pasta, who played the part of *Tancredi* as long as she remained on the stage, and whose favourite piece, after she had left it, to appear only at concerts, was

* M. Azevedo's idea on the subject is certainly the best. "Since its production," he says, "on the stage and in the universe it has been made the subject of a canticle for the Catholic Church, like all other successful airs. But a litany before the air and a canticle after the air are not the same thing." M. Azevedo also rejects the rice.

still "Di tanti palpiti?" It has been seen that Madame Malanotte was the original *Tancredi* at Venice; Madame Pasta was the first representative of the character in France and England, and Pisaroni, Malibran, and Madame Viardot-Garcia afterwards distinguished themselves in the same part.

The most brilliant *Amenaide* ever heard was probably Madame Sontag, who appeared in that character in 1829 to Malibran's *Tancredi.*

CHAPTER VI.

ROSSINI'S REFORMS IN COMIC OPERA.

As Rossini found the opera seria of his day too serious, so he found the opera buffa too broadly comic. He was accused of treating tragic subjects melodramatically — which meant that he made them interesting. In dealing with comic subjects he took care to keep above the level of farce, his general tone being that of comedy, into which he now and then, but not often, introduced a touch of sentiment ("Languir per una bella" in "L'Italiana," "Ecco ridente il cielo" in "Il Barbiere").

The old opera buffa, with its separate set of characters and singers, and its own separate style, musical as well as dramatic, died out under the influence of Rossini's innovations. It is said to have been very fine, by those who liked it; but apparently Rossini did not like it, for after trying his hand at a few specimens (of which the notorious

little operetta or farza with the lamp-shade accompaniment seems to have been the last) he abandoned it, as after a single trial (Velluti in "Aureliano in Palmira") he abandoned the sopranists.

If Rossini ever wrote an opera seria in the old style, it must have been that work of his early youth, "Demetrio e Polibio," of which all that seems to be known is, that it was composed in 1809 for the Mombellis, and produced at Rome in 1812.

It must have seemed strange and rather awful to some obstinate habitués (and habitués are often as obstinate as habit itself) that the same singer should come before them one night as *Moses*, and the next as *Doctor Bartholo*, one night as *Figaro*, and the next as *Assur* in "Semiramide." At the same time they appear to have been annoyed with Rossini both because in his serious works he was not more severe, and because in his comic works he was not more grotesque.

The fact is, Rossini rendered both styles more natural, more like life, as far as life can be represented in opera, and certainly more dramatic.

In "L'Italiana in Algeri" we see only the first

essay in the style which was to be brought to perfection in "Il Barbiere" and "Cenerentola;" but "L'Italiana" was the forerunner of these works, just as "Tancredi," in the serious style, was the forerunner of "Otello" and "Semiramide."

"L'Italiana in Algeri," like "Tancredi," was composed for Venice; this time neither for the San Mosè nor the Fenice, but for the San Benedetto. The principal part was written for Madame Marcolini, who again, as in "L'Equivoco Stravagante," and "La Pietra del Paragone," was provided with a brilliant rondo finale.

In the concerted finale of the first act the prolonged crescendo was found as effective as the same device had proved in "Tancredi." Rossini had now adopted his crescendo, never to forsake it; and if he was faithful to it, it certainly was faithful to him, and never once deceived him.

The recitatives in "L'Italiana in Algeri," as in "Tancredi," are still rather long. The dramatic progress, too, in "L'Italiana" is slow, and the acts, as in all Rossini's two-act operas—that is to say, all his important Italian operas, with the exception of "Otello"—last a prodigious time.

It must be remembered that when these operas were written it was the custom in Italy to give a divertissement, or even a long ballet, between the acts. As to the lengthiness of the recitatives, that was an affair of very little importance. No one was obliged to listen to them, and private conversation took place between the pieces, as public dancing took place between the acts.

Not only recitatives, but inferior airs, were neglected in this manner. If *Tancredi's* air was called "Aria dei rizzi," because it was composed while rice was being cooked, *Berta's* air in "Il Barbiere" got to be known as the "Aria di sorbetto," because people used to eat ices while it was being sung.

Rossini, no doubt, effected a reform in the conduct of his audiences as well in that of his dramas. The public were quite right not to listen to interminable recitatives; and when Rossini shortened his, and gave them a more dramatic character, at the same time increasing the number and variety of musical pieces in each act, he soon gained the full attention of his audience; after which, one excuse at least for being tedious had disappeared.

The worst of it was that, almost as soon as Rossini had brought the Italian public to listen to his operas from beginning to end, he ceased to write. "Il Barbiere" was composed in 1816, and he never gave Italy a note after "Semiramide" in 1823.

The moment has now arrived for recording an anecdote. It is not pleasant to tell it for the five hundredth time; but a place for the most celebrated of all the Rossini anecdotes must somewhere be found, and it belongs to the year 1813, of which we take leave with the present chapter.

It was in the eventful year, then, of 1813—the year of "Il Figlio per Azzardo," with its obbligato accompaniment for lamp-shades, of "Tancredi," and of "L'Italiana in Algeri"—that Rossini was writing one morning in bed, when the duet on which he was engaged fell from his hands.

"Nothing easier," an ordinary composer would say, "than to pick it up again."

"Nothing easier," said Rossini, "than to write a new one in its place."

Rossini would not get out of bed for a mere

duet. He set to work and composed another, which did not resemble the original one in the least.

A friend called. "I have just dropped a duet," said Rossini, "I wish you would get it for me. You will find it somewhere under the bed."

The friend felt for the duet with his cane, fished it out, and handed it to the composer.

"Now which do you like best?" asked Rossini; "I have written two."

He sang them both. The friend thought the character of the first was most in keeping with the dramatic situation. Rossini was of the same opinion, and decided to turn the second duet into a trio.

He finished his trio, got up, dressed, sent the two pieces to the theatrical copyist, and went out to breakfast.

This anecdote is often told in illustration of Rossini's laziness, as if a really active man would have got out of bed to pick up the fallen duet rather than set to work, *lazily*, to compose a new one.

Many volumes might be written on this question. It will be sufficient, however, to point out that activity is mere liveliness of the body, as liveliness

is activity of the mind. So laziness is dulness of the body, dulness laziness of the mind. Rossini had a lively mind in a lazy body. He could not have walked a thousand miles in a thousand hours; but he wrote the "Barber of Seville" in thirteen days.

CHAPTER VII.

ROSSINI'S REFORMS IN WRITING FOR THE VOICE.

ROSSINI encountered no serious obstacles in his career. He was never crossed in love like Beethoven—indeed, in his numerous affairs of the heart, he seems always to have been met half way; nor did his works ever remain unappreciated for more than about twenty-four hours at a time.

He was never lamentably poor, like Schubert; for though in the earlier part of his career he was badly paid, he could always earn twenty or thirty pounds, the price of an opera, by working for two or three weeks.

To tell the truth, he seems never to have been depressed or elevated by the aspirations of Mozart; and he had (to use a favourite word of his) the same "facility" in succeeding that he invariably manifested in producing.

He attacked no subject that he did not make

something of. If, as occasionally happened, an opera of his fell to the ground, he literally picked up the pieces and turned the best of them to account in building up and adorning some new work. This great artist and practical philosopher had already, as we know, written a "Cyrus in Babylon" for Ferrara, when he was called upon to produce an "Aurelian in Palmyra" at Milan.

"Ciro in Babilonia," though it contained some very beautiful pieces, had not, as a whole, been particularly successful; and Rossini probably thought that in its oratorio form it was not likely to be repeated. At all events, he extracted from it a magnificent chorus for his "Aureliano;" to be thence transplanted in another shape — when "Aureliano" in its turn had failed—to the "Barber of Seville." He also wrote for "Aureliano" an admirable overture, which a year afterwards was taken to Naples to serve as introduction to "Elisabetta," and the year after that ("Elisabetta" having perished) to Rome, where it got prefixed to the immortal "Barber"—from whom may it never be separated!

Beethoven, for one opera, composed three over-

tures. Rossini made one overture serve for three operas; and it is remarkable that of these, two were serious, the third eminently comic.

Rossini's life, as has just been observed, presents no dramatic interest. Such interest as it does possess belongs entirely to the composer's artistic career, and consists in the reforms that he introduced into operatic art.

After "Tancredi," in which we notice Rossini's first innovations in opera seria, and "L'Italiana in Algeri," which holds a corresponding place in the history of his comic operas, came "Aureliano in Palmira," which marks another step in advance, not, as in the two previous instances, by reason of its success, but through failure.

In "Aureliano," Rossini had written a part for the celebrated sopranist, Velluti ("non vir sed veluti"). Rossini did not like Velluti's singing, and Velluti did not like Rossini's music; or, at least, did not like the composer's objecting to his music being so disfigured under the pretext of embellishment as to be rendered absolutely unrecognisable.

The result of this disagreement was that

"Aureliano" was not played after the first night, and that Rossini worked no more for sopranists. "Velluti," the last of his order, went on singing for a dozen years afterwards, and Rossini from that time wrote his own ornaments for the singers, and so elaborately, that with the best will they were not likely to add much of their own.

We hear a great deal of the decay of singing as an art; but that art was thought so much of when Rossini began to write that more important things—dramatic propriety and music itself—were sacrificed to it. What would Italian singers of the year 1813 have thought of "William Tell?" and how would their highly-decorative style have suited that simple, energetic, thoroughly dramatic music? The development of Rossini's dramatic faculty was, no doubt, delayed by his having often to write for singers so accomplished, that they could think of nothing but the exhibition of their own voice.

In spite of the praise lavished by contemporary writers on the vocalists of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, it can be shown by the very terms in which the praise is sounded that these artists possessed a most un-

desirable talent, or, at least, exhibited their talent in a most undesirable way.

In the present day, many singers who have come before the public with considerable success, are said never to have studied singing systematically at all. They have learned under a skilful professor so many parts—as amateur pianists learn particular pieces, without attempting to master the whole art of pianoforte playing.

The great singers of the eighteenth century acquired their facility of execution, which was what chiefly distinguished them, by a very different method. Far from studying parts, they sometimes did not even learn airs. To take an oft-quoted case, in which the extreme of the system seems to have been reached, Caffarelli was kept practising scales and a few exercises for five years; after which his master, the celebrated Porpora, is reported to have said to him,—

"Now go, Caffarelli; you have no more to learn! You are the first singer in the world."

Yet, with all respect to Porpora, what, after such meagre, mechanical instruction as this, would Caffarelli have been able to make of a great dramatic

part? What would a vocalist, taught as Caffarelli had been taught, make in the present day of the part of *Arnold* in "Guillaume Tell," or of *Raoul* in "Les Huguenots"?

Meyerbeer would certainly not have allowed such a singer to take the part of *Vasco di Gama* in "L'Africaine," which he reserved (in Germany) for Wachtel—by no means a Caffarelli!

Rossini would have quarrelled with Caffarelli, as he did with Velluti, and would have told him not to overload his music with absurd embellishments.

Stendhal, who frequently takes the parts of the singers, sopranists and all, against Rossini, for whose music he nevertheless professes unbounded admiration, puts to himself this suggestive question,—

"If Rossini, in 1814, had found a greater number of good singers, could he have thought of the revolution he has brought about, would he have introduced the system of writing everything down?"

"His self-love," he replies, "would perhaps have suggested it, but that of the singers would vigorously have opposed it. Look, in our own day, at Velluti, who refuses to sing his music."

And, therefore, Stendhal adds, that if called upon

to choose between the two systems, he should decide in favour of the ancient system somewhat modernised.

"I would not have all the ornaments written down, but I would have the liberty of the singer restrained. It is not right that Velluti should sing the cavatina of 'Aureliano' so that the author can scarcely recognise it himself. In that case it is Velluti who is really the author of the airs he sings, and it is better to keep two such different arts separate."

These remarks occur in Stendhal's "Vie de Rossini," page 263 of the 1864 edition (chapter XXXI.—Rossini se répète-t-il plus qu'un autre ?); but they belong to the Abbé Carpani, on whose "Rossiniane" (as already mentioned) Stendhal's "Vie de Rossini" is founded. Beyle, calling himself Stendhal, took all his biographical facts, most of his critical opinions, from Carpani, and added a number of those ingenious remarks on love, Walter Scott's novels, temperaments in the North and in the South of Europe, the points of difference between French, English, and Italian society, &c., which, together with the inevitable, and, at first, rather striking appeals to

the reader to throw the book on one side if he does not feel quite capable of appreciating it, are common to all the works of Stendhal—a most original writer, in spite of his curious plagiarisms in connection with music. Beyle had previously borrowed the same Carpani's "Haydine," which he attributed to "Bombet." In thus plundering Carpani to enrich Bombet and Stendhal, Beyle has caused much needless confusion, especially in those passages where he speaks in the first person. Thus "Stendhal" represents himself as well acquainted with Rossini, —who, though he constantly met Carpani in 1822, at Vienna, knew nothing of "Stendhal."

However, it is Carpani who raises the question whether Velluti ought to be sacrificed to Rossini, or Rossini to Velluti; and his views on the subject as an Italian connoisseur of the year 1823, and an enthusiastic admirer of Rossini's music, are certainly valuable.

The system—astonishing system!—of writing airs precisely as they are to be sung, is now recognised by all composers. Nothing is left to the singer. Formerly, even if restrained in regard to the body of the air, the vocalist was at least

allowed to take some little liberties in the cadenza. Now cadenzas and everything are written for him, and it is conceived a piece of bad taste if a singer substitutes a cadenza of his own for the one already set down for him by the composer.

As a matter of serious criticism the question so clearly posed when the singer Velluti, and the composer Rossini, came into collision at the first representation of "Aureliano in Palmira," is scarcely worth discussing. It may have been good practice for the singers of the eighteenth century to exercise themselves on the composer's melodies; but Rossini knew that it was not his part to supply these acrobats with bits of carpet on which to perform their gymnastic feats.

Velluti is said to have been much applauded at the first representation of "Aureliano in Palmira"—merely a sign of bad taste on the part of the audience; but Rossini would have no more to do with him, and told him to take his talent for "embroidery" elsewhere. He took it to Meyerbeer. Fancy Meyerbeer—the Meyerbeer of "Le Prophète"—allowing his airs to be "embroidered!" But this was the Meyerbeer of the year 1824; and in "Il

Crociato," Velluti, the last of the sopranists, found his last new part.

"The great singers," says Stendhal (meaning the sopranists from the end of the seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century), "did not change the motive of their airs, which they presented the first time with great simplicity.* Then they began to embroider."

Exactly so. If they had begun to "embroider" before presenting the motive in all its simplicity, where would have been the proof of their inventive talent?

"Millico, Aprile, Farinelli, Pacchierotti, Ansani, Babini, Marchesi," continues Carpani, "owed their glory to the system of the old composers, who in certain parts of their operas gave them little more than a canvas."

* "Le ombreggiature per le messe di voce, il cantar di partarrenti, l'arte di fermare la voce per farla fluire equale nel canto legato, l'arte di prender fiato in modo insensibile e senza troncare il lungo periodo vocale delle arte antiche." This passage is from Carpani. Stendhal, not finding it easy to translate, gives it, in Italian, as his own, and endeavours to explain his use of the Italian language by saying that he finds "an almost insurmountable difficulty in writing about singing in French." This mania for "adaptation" makes one doubt the originality of everything Stendhal has done.

In exhibiting their talent first in the simple, and afterwards in the highly decorative style, they appear in each case to have gone to extremes. If they had a fault, Stendhal admits that they were sometimes languishing and lackadaisical in their delivery of slow sustained melody; and he applauds Rossini for introducing a brisker style of sentiment into serious opera. But Rossini's great objection to them was that they were too much addicted to ornament; and Stendhal has himself told us that Velluti, in "Aureliano," decorated his music to such an extent as to render it unrecognisable by the composer.

"Aureliano in Palmira," when it was brought out in London, met with no more success than it had obtained at Milan. It is interesting to notice that this was the only opera of Rossini's which pleased Lord Mount Edgcumbe. The old habitué liked it because it was not a true Rossinian opera at all, but an opera composed after the manner of Rossini's predecessors.

"Rossini," says Stendhal, in his interesting account of the first representation of "Aureliano in Palmira," which he claims to have witnessed,

"followed altogether, in his first works, the style of his predecessors. He respected the voices, and only thought of bringing about the triumph of singing. Such is the system in which he composed 'Demetrio e Polibio,' 'L'Inganno felice,' 'La Pietra del Paragone,' 'Tancredi,' etc. Rossini had found la Marcolini, la Malanotte, la Manfredini, the Mombelli family, why should he not endeavour to give prominence to the singing, he who is such a good singer, and who when he sits down to the piano to sing one of his own airs, seems to transfer the genius we know him to possess as a composer, into that of a singer? The fact is, a little event took place which at once changed the composer's views. . . . Rossini arrived at Milan in 1814 to write 'Aureliano in Palmira.' There he met with Velluti, who was to sing in his opera: Velluti, then in the flower of his youth and talent, one of the best-looking men of his time, and much given to abuse his prodigious resources. Rossini had never heard this singer. He wrote a cavatina for him. At the first rehearsal with full orchestra, he heard Velluti sing it, and was struck with admiration. At the second rehearsal Velluti began to embroider (*fiorire*). Rossini found

some of his effects admirable, and still approved: but at the third rehearsal, the richness of the embroidery was such that it quite concealed the body of the air. At last the grand day of the first representation arrived. The cavatina and all Velluti's part were enthusiastically applauded, but Rossini could scarcely recognise what Velluti was singing; he did not know his own music. However, Velluti's singing was very beautiful and wonderfully successful with the public, which after all does no wrong in applauding what gives it so much pleasure. The pride of the young composer was deeply wounded; the opera failed, and the sopranist alone succeeded. Rossini's lively perception saw at once all that such an event could suggest. 'It is by a fortunate accident,' he said to himself, 'that Velluti happens to be a singer of taste;* but how am I to know that at the next theatre I write for I shall not find another singer who, with a flexible throat, and an equal mania for *fioriture*, will not spoil my music so as to render it not only unrecognisable to me, but also weari-

* There is nothing to prove that Rossini entertained any such opinion of Velluti's singing.

some to the public, or at least remarkable only for some details of execution? The danger of my unfortunate music is the more imminent in so much as there are no more singing schools in Italy. The theatres are full of artists who have picked up music from singing-masters about the country. This style of singing violin concertos, endless variations, will not only destroy all talent for singing, but will also vitiate the public taste. All the singers will be imitating Velluti, each according to his means. We shall have no more cantilenas; they would be thought poor and cold. Everything will undergo a change, even to the nature of the voices which, once accustomed to embroider and overlay a cantilena with elaborate ornaments, will soon lose the habit of singing sustained legato passages, and be unable to execute them. I must change my system, then. I know how to sing; everyone acknowledges that I possess that talent; my *fioriture* will be in good taste; moreover, I shall discover at once the strong and weak points of my singers, and shall only write for them what they will be able to execute. I will not leave them a place for adding the least apoggiatura.

The *fioriture*, the ornaments, must form an integral part of the air, and be all written in the score.'"

Velluti, who is said to have been prepared with three elaborate cadenzas of his own composition for every air he sang, must have been highly disgusted to find that Rossini objected altogether to his departing from the written text. For the sopranists were very great personages. When Caffarelli heard that the accomplished Farinelli had been made prime minister to the King of Spain, he is reported to have said: "He is a magnificent singer, and fully deserves the honour." The sopranist, Marchesi, stipulated, when he was at the height of his fame, that he should be allowed to make his entry and sing his cavatina on horseback or from the summit of a mountain, also that the plume in his helmet should be at least five feet high!

Rossini's dislike to Velluti's style of singing, being founded on principle, was permanent; and on his visiting Paris many years afterwards, Mr. Eben tells us ("Seven Years at the King's Theatre") that "Rossini being at this time engaged at Paris under his agreement to direct there, Velluti did not enter

into his plans, and having made no engagement there, came over to England."

Perhaps one of the best singing masters of the eighteenth century was Frederick the Great, who, as Dr. Burney tells us, was accustomed to take up his position in the pit of his opera-house, behind the conductor of the orchestra, so as to have a view of the score; when if a singer ventured to alter a single passage in his part, his Majesty severely reprimanded him, and ordered him to keep to the notes written by the composer. The Berlin opera would have been a good school for the sopranists, "who," says M. Castil-Blaze,* "were at all times extremely insolent. They forced the greatest masters to conform to their caprices. They changed, transformed everything to suit their own vanity. They would insist on having an air or a duet placed in such a scene, written in such a style, with such and such an accompaniment. They were the kings, the tyrants, of theatres, managers, and composers; that is why in the most serious works of the greatest masters of the last century long, cold passages of vocalisation occur, which had been exacted by the

† Théâtres Lyriques de Paris, "L'Opéra Italien," p. 317.

sopranists for the sake of exhibiting in a striking manner the agility and power of their throats. 'You will be kind enough to sing my music, and not yours,' said the venerable and formidable Guglielmi to a certain virtuoso, threatening him at the same time with his sword. In fact the vocal music and the whole Italian lyrical system of the eighteenth century was much more the work of the singers than of the composers."

Rossini then was not only a great composer, he was also a sort of Jack the Giant Killer. To be sure these giants of sopranists, with their vocal equestrianism, their shouting from the summits of mountains, and their plumes five feet high, were already approaching their last days. Still the great Velluti was in his vigour in 1814, and it was in that year that the young Rossini declared war against these Philistines, and succeeded in liberating vocal music from the tyranny of vocalists.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM MILAN TO NAPLES.

ROSSINI would have been amused if any one had written a book about him and his music entitled "Rossini and his Three Styles." He liked discussing the principles and also the practice of his art in good company—witness the "Conversations with Rossini," recorded by Ferdinand Hiller. But he cared little for fine distinctions, and he is reported to have said that he knew nothing of French music, German music, or Italian music; that he only knew of two kinds of music—good and bad.

Nevertheless, all writers, painters, musicians, who have a style at all, have at least three styles—an imitative style, a tentative style, and finally, a style of their own. This division being admitted, Rossini entered upon his second style in writing "Tancredi," and "L'Italiana in Algeri" (1813); and did not

attain his third style until he wrote in the same year (1816) "Otello" for Naples, and "Il Barbiere" for Rome.

If it be thought absolutely necessary to place "Guillaume Tell" and Rossini's French operas in a category by themselves, then we must say that Rossini had three styles (the consecrated number); and "Guillaume Tell" being manifestly in the third and last style, "Otello" must be put back to the second, and "Tancredi" to the first.

Theory apart, it is quite certain that Rossini, after his collision with Velluti, altered his system of writing for the voice — embellishing his airs, where he thought embellishments necessary, in such a manner that to embellish them further, at the will of the singer, was out of the question.

It is also certain that at Naples, from his arrival there in 1815, he passed under the artistic influence of Madame Colbran, his future wife, for whom he wrote no less than ten important parts, beginning with *Elisabetta* and *Desdemona*, and ending with *Zelmira* and *Semiramide*.

In the meanwhile, between the historical "Aureliano," which represents his breach with decorative

vocalists, priding themselves on their individuality and their power of invention, on the one hand, and the equally historical "Elisabetta," which represents his arrival at Naples, and the commencement of the period in which he cultivated serious opera alone, on the other, an interval of more than eighteen months must be supposed to elapse, during which Rossini wrote two operas, "Il Turco in Italia," and "Sigismondo."

The manager of La Scala wanted a pendent to "L'Italiana in Algeri."

The basso Galli, who had for several years played with great success the part of the *Bey* in the "Italiana," was now provided with the part of a young Turk who finds himself alone among Christians, as the "Italiana" had found herself alone among Mahomedans. Shipwrecked on the Italian coast, the youthful infidel reaches land and falls in love with the first pretty woman he meets. The pretty woman has, after the fashion of her native land, both a husband and a lover, and she torments them both by affecting a deep regard for the Turkish stranger. Galli was especially successful in his first air—a salutation to Italy, which was found very

appropriate, inasmuch as the singer had just returned to Milan from Barcelona. The composer, however, was not so fortunate as the vocalist, the house resounded with cries of "Bravo Galli," but "Bravo Maestro" was not once heard. The critics of the period found that there was a want of novelty in Rossini's music, in fact that he had repeated himself. The truth is, continuations of successful works are seldom successful themselves. So much do first impressions count for, that the merit of a continuation must be superior to that of the original under pain of appearing inferior.

The shipwrecked Turk could not be permanently saved; but, true to his principles, Rossini rescued what he could from the general disaster. He had written an admirable overture for this "Turk in Italy," which, when "Otello" was brought out, served with more or less appropriateness to introduce the Moor of Venice.

"Sigismondo" has left even fainter traces than "Il Turço in Italia." It was produced at Venice (Fenice theatre) towards the close of 1814; and the night of its production Rossini, who always

gave his mother the earliest news of the fate his works had met with, enclosed her a drawing of a bottle—or *fiasco.*

Rossini was not progressing. He had written nothing successful (though "Aureliano in Palmira" contained much that deserved to succeed) since the summer of 1813, when "L'Italiana in Algeri" was produced. This year of 1814 was the only one in which he ever received anything like a check; perhaps he was collecting himself for the great achievements of 1816, the year of "Otello" and "Il Barbiere." In the meanwhile, even in 1814, he had done his year's work. He had written two operas, besides a cantata, "Egle e Irene," composed for the princess Belgiojoso.

At this time Rossini received only the miserable sum of about forty pounds for an opera. This money was paid to him by the impresario and represented the exclusive right of performing the work for two years. Few if any of his operas seem to have been engraved at the time of production, so that there was nothing to receive from music publishers, the sole refuge of dramatic composers in England (if dramatic composers in Eng-

land still exist) to whom no payment is paid by managers for the right of representation.

Rossini at least derived one advantage from the non-publication of his works: he could borrow from them, or turn the old ones into new with greater facility. Rumours would be circulated when a new work of Rossini's was brought out that this or that piece was only a reproduction from a previous opera, and the audiences were not always well pleased when they fancied they were being "imposed upon" in this manner. The manager at the theatre was usually one of the principal noblemen, or sometimes a rich banker of the place, and not only every capital, every important city, in Italy had its opera, but also every large and many very small towns.

Stendhal speaks of a town of ten thousand inhabitants where the grass grew in the street, which contrived to maintain its opera in good condition. The principal cities kept up several operas. We have seen that at Venice there were three: the Fenice, the San Benedetto, and the San Mosè. The two principal theatres in Italy were those of La Scala at Milan, and San Carlo at Naples; but Rome, thanks to the influence of the eminent dilettante,

Cardinal Gonsalvi * (who with infinite trouble succeeded in persuading Pope Pius VII. to remove the prohibition laid upon theatrical entertainments), had also its opera-houses,—the Argentina, the Valle, the Apollo, the Alberti, and the Tordinona.

The best of these theatres were well organised, and the performances at Rome during the carnival were particularly renowned. "Il Barbiere" was composed for Rome, and produced at the Argentina theatre during the carnival of 1816; "La Cenerentola" was also written for Rome, and brought

* Cardinal Gonsalvi was devoted to music and had a sincere attachment to Cimarosa, the greatest Italian composer of his time. "At the commencement of my ministry (secretaryship of state)," he writes in his memoirs, "I experienced two very great afflictions, not to speak of many others. One had no connection with my office: it was the death of my great friend Domenico Cimarosa, the first composer, in my opinion, both for inspiration and science, as Raphael is the first of painters." In Cardinal Gonsalvi's will the following passage occurs:—"Fifty masses a year for the repose of the soul of the celebrated maestro Domenico Cimarosa, to be said in the church of the Rotunda on the 11th of January, the anniversary of his death, with the gift of the paoli." Cimarosa had then been dead upwards of twenty years, but the Cardinal forgot neither him nor his family, as will be seen from the following clauses in the same will:—"To the nun Cimarosa at the convent of the Infant Jesus, one hundred ounces of silver and the snuff-box with the portrait of her father; moreover the annual pension of forty crowns spoken of in the will to be increased to eighty. To Paulina Cimarosa one hundred ounces of silver and all the music of her father with his large portrait, the whole free of carriage to Naples; moreover an annual pension of seventy-two crowns.'

out at the Valle theatre during the carnival of 1817. "Matilda di Sabran" was given for the first time at Rome at the Apollo theatre during the carnival of 1821. The Roman theatres were badly built, chiefly of wood; but the Argentina and the Valle theatres, where "Il Barbiere" and "Cenerentola" were produced, may be remembered in the history of art when many magnificent edifices in stone are forgotten. For the Argentina theatre not only Rossini's masterpiece in the comic style, but also (as for the Alberti) many of the best works of Pergolese, Cimarosa, and Paisiello were composed.

The Fenice theatre, where Rossini produced his first important opera in the serious style, "Tancredi," and also the last in that style which he wrote for Italy, "Semiramide," ranked next to the theatres of La Scala and San Carlo, or rather, it should be said, immediately after La Scala—the Neapolitan Opera House holding the first place among all. "This singular town," says Stendhal, "now the gayest in Europe, will thirty years hence [1823] be only an unhealthy village unless Italy wakes up and gives herself but one king, in which case I

shall vote for Venice, an impregnable city, as capital."

Stendhal possessed a certain amount of foresight. He had an idea that somewhere about the year 1853 a united Italy would be formed. He also prophesied, or rather pointed out, that in the natural course of things (1), Mozart would outlive Rossini; (2) that the composer who obtained the next great success after Rossini would compose simple expressive melodies (fulfilled in the case of Bellini); (3) that the Italian style of Rossini and the German style of Weber would be united in one composer, whose works would be produced at Paris (an evident prevision of Meyerbeer).

After the Fenice ranked the Court theatre of Turin, for which Rossini never composed a note, and which seems to have been a singularly formal and dull establishment in Rossini's days. "Forming part of the king's palace, it was considered disrespectful to appear there in a cloak, disrespectful to laugh, and disrespectful to applaud, till the queen had applauded." This, the fourth theatre in Italy, gave its best representations during the carnival; it was also opened from time to time during Lent.

Florence, Bologna, Genoa, Sienna, Ferrara, had all their Operas, which were of repute at certain seasons of the year—sometimes during the carnival, sometimes in the autumn. At Bergámo the best performances took place during the local fair at Leghorn during the summer season. Most of the lyrical theatres in the capitals and large towns were protected by the sovereign. In the small towns the magnates of the place contributed to the maintenance of the opera either by absolute donations or by nobly risking their money.

The Emperor of Austria gave a subscription of about eight thousand pounds a year to La Scala, the King of Naples nearly twelve thousand to San Carlo. These magnificent opera houses, at one time the two finest in the world, now eclipsed in architectural splendour, if not in fame, were also supported by public gambling tables established in spacious saloons adjoining the theatre. The keeper of the bank did a sufficiently good business to be able to pay a large sum out of his profits to the "Impresario." The Austrian Government suppressed the gambling in the saloons of La Scala in the year 1822, and King Ferdinand, finding that it had been forbidden at

San Carlo during the revolution which brought him to the throne, did not authorise its re-introduction.

Opera is a costly entertainment, and has never flourished anywhere unless sustained by the munificence of sovereigns, or of a rich and cultivated aristocracy. We know what the theatres of La Scala and San Carlo did under the system of large subventions. They will never regain their ancient splendour under a parliamentary government involving discussion of the state budget and limitation of state expenditure.

The municipalities and small towns made grants to the local operas, as Ascot, Epsom, and a hundred towns in England give plates to be run for at the annual races. All these musical theatres, great and small, were bound at certain periods to bring out new works. The composers were not liberally paid, but a large number of operas had to be furnished every year, and the demand caused a supply.

Musical composition was maintained as a living art. The new works attracted new audiences, who again called out for new works. The production of opera was artificially encouraged and protected, like

horse-racing in England. It was contrary to the principles of political economy, but it succeeded. The native breed of singers and composers was decidedly improved.

The order of performance at the Italian theatres was rather absurd. This has already been mentioned, but it is worth remembering in connection with Rossini's operas. First one act of an opera was given, then a ballet, which frequently lasted upwards of an hour, then the second act of the opera, and finally a short ballet or divertissement. With the representation composed in this manner, the natural division of an opera, for no artistic reasons, but simply as a matter of convenience, was into two acts.

This division being accepted the concerted finale, the great test-piece of the work, was placed at the end of the first act. Here the dramatic knot was tied, the solution of which is celebrated in all Rossini's comic operas by a joyous air for the prima donna at the end of Act II. If Rossini had been composing for theatres where, as in Germany, France, and England, it is the custom to perform an opera continuously from beginning to end, certainly neither he nor his librettist would have

thought of reducing the five acts of Beaumarchais's "Barbier de Séville," of Voltaire's "Sémiramis," to only two. In the operatic system of Rossini's time the three first acts of a five act drama went to form the first act of a two act opera. Naturally, then, these first acts are rather long. In the first act of "Semiramide" the finale alone lasts a good half-hour, considerably more than the entire first act in many of the operas of Signor Verdi, whose favourite division is into four acts.

I may once more mention, to explain the otherwise inexplicable patience of the Italian audiences beneath the interminable recitatives which are to be found, not only in the works of Rossini's predecessors, but also (though at much more moderate length) in the earlier works of Rossini himself, that these recitatives were not listened to except at the first representation, when nothing was lost. At the succeeding performances conversation was carried on freely during the intervals between the principal pieces. The place for determined listeners who wished to hear everything, was supposed to be the pit.

A really successful opera was performed some

thirty times. At the first three representations the execution was directed by the composer, who presided at the piano, until that instrument was expelled from the orchestra by Rossini. The position then of the maestro when the work was hissed was by no means an agreeable one. Rossini wrote thirty-four operas for Italy in fourteen years, or at the rate of about two and a half a year. In no other country could such a number of new operas have been produced on the stage in the same time; but each of the great Italian theatres made a point of bringing out at least two new operas every year, and we have seen that the minor theatres were also regularly supplied with new and original works.

The Italian managers, to be sure, had no idea of wasting the time and money expended in France and England on the production of operas in which the spectacle and general *mise en scène* are thought quite as important, if not more so, than the music. The Italian theatres, nevertheless, had admirable scene painters; and new scenery, of high artistic excellence, was painted for every opera brought out.

Rossini, until he established his head-quarters at Naples, was constantly travelling about Italy. Each

journey was a triumphal progress. The dilettanti of each town he arrived at welcomed him, fêted him, and overwhelmed him with attentions of all kinds. He seldom began to write until a few weeks, sometimes a very few weeks indeed, before the day fixed for the first representation. Occasionally these weeks dwindled into days. Then the impresario, from nervous became delirious; and stories are told of Rossini's being locked up in the manager's room, and egress absolutely denied to him until the work he was engaged upon was finished.

These periodical fits of despair were not without their effect, and Rossini used, many years afterwards, to say that to them and to the tearing of hair which accompanied them, might be attributed the premature baldness by which all the Italian managers of his time were afflicted.

PART II.

ROSSINI AT NAPLES.

CHAPTER I.

ROSSINI, BARBAJA, AND MDLLE. COLBRAN.

NAPLES and Dresden had long been the two great operatic centres of Europe. For the sake of harmony and regularity, it is usual to mention Sebastian Bach as the founder of the German school, in contrast to Alessandro Scarlatti, the founder of the Italian school of music. But as regards the opera, Germany inherited from Scarlatti almost as much as Italy herself. If Durante, the celebrated Neapolitan professor, was a pupil of Scarlatti, so also was Hasse, who raised the Dresden theatre to a pitch of excellence unequalled elsewhere out of Italy. Hasse directed the music at Dresden for more than a quarter of a century, and, thanks to the liberality of Augustus of Saxony, better connoisseur than king, was able to make its orchestra one of the finest, if not absolutely the finest, in Europe.

"The first orchestra in Europe," says Rousseau,* "in respect to the number and science of the symphonists, is that of Naples. But the orchestra of the Opera of the King of Poland at Dresden, directed by the illustrious Hasse, is better distributed, and forms a better ensemble."

The magnificence of the Saxon kings declined with the power of Poland; and towards the close of the eighteenth century the musical glory of the Dresden opera may be said to have been "partitioned," like Poland itself, between Joseph II., who presided at the production of Mozart's "Nozze di Figaro," Catherine II., who invited Paisiello and Cimarosa to her court, and Frederic, the great flute player and general director of the opera at Berlin. Seriously, the two great musical capitals of Germany were Vienna and Prague, and the dilettanti of Naples thought more than ever that the supremacy of their opera in all Europe was not to be questioned.

When Rossini's fame, thanks to "Tancredi" and "L'Italiana in Algeri," was spreading all over Italy,

* Dictionnaire Musicale, Article *Orchestre.* Rousseau wrote the dictionary in 1754, though it was not published for some years afterwards.

the impresario of the San Carlo at Naples, who had also undertaken the management of the Teatro del Fondo in the same city, was the celebrated Barbaja, a personage to whom an important place belongs in operatic history.

Barbaja was not one of those Italian grand seigneurs who from time to time, for the love of art and of a prima donna, ruined themselves in the management of an opera. Neither was he a rich banker in the general sense of the word—though he had kept the bank in the gambling saloon of La Scala at Milan. Previously he had fulfilled the less lucrative duties of waiter at the La Scala café; and he is also said to have taken part in the speculations of the French army contractors. One way and another he made a large fortune, and arriving at Naples obtained the directorship of the San Carlo theatre.

Barbaja knew nothing of music or he might have ruined himself—he might have insisted, for instance, on producing "le Nozze di Figaro," "Don Giovanni," or even "Fidelio." But he could tell a successful from an unsuccessful composer, and he saw that the young Rossini of "Tancredi" and

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"L'Italiana in Algeri" celebrity was the man of the day.

Barbaja had previously speculated in Cimarosa, and he afterwards invested in Donizetti and Bellini. He deserves a biography to himself, and certainly no one could have furnished better materials for a biography of Rossini, with whom he had constant relations for nine years during the most active and brilliant period of Rossini's career.

Literary honours have been paid to the great impresario by Scribe, who introduces him into one of his ingenious opera-books ("La Sirène," is it not?); and he has even been casually mentioned by the immortal Balzac.

If he had lived long enough, if he had lived in the days of railways and the electric telegraph, he might have directed half the opera houses in Europe. As it was, he contented himself in the year 1824 with conducting two theatres at Naples and one at Vienna.

At the Vienna Opera House he collected the finest company ever known, including Davide, Nozzari, Donzelli, Rubini, Cicimarra, as tenors; Lablache, Bassi (Niccolo), Ambroggi, Tamburini,

Botticelli, as basses; Mesdames Mainvielle-Fodor, Colbran, Féron, Mombelli (Esther), Dardanelli, Sontag, Unger, Grisi (Giuditta), Grimbaun, as sopranos; Mesdames Rubini, Cesar-Cantarelli, Eckerlin, as contraltos.

In the year 1814 Barbaja went to Bologna, called upon Rossini, and, with the liberality of an intelligent speculator dealing with an evidently rising artist, offered him a very much better engagement than had ever been within his reach before.

On his arrival at Naples Rossini signed a contract with Barbaja for several years, by which he agreed to write two new operas annually, and to arrange the music of all old works the manager might wish to produce, either at the San Carlo or at the Teatro del Fondo. For this the maestro was to receive two hundred ducats (nearly forty pounds) a month and a share in the profits of the bank in the San Carlo gambling saloon.

This was not much compared to what Rossini afterwards received as retaining salary, and in the shape of author's fees, during his engagement at Paris; but it was magnificent considering the paltry

sums he had earned at Venice and Milan. In point of fact, Rossini had now something more to do than compose operas; he had undertaken the musical direction of two opera houses, one of which was the most important in Europe. In addition to his own work as composer, he had to do a prodigious amount of transposition to suit the voices of new and old singers; he had to improve, to correct, to reset, to re-score, to fulfil, in short, all the arduous and laborious duties of a musical conductor.

For a "lazy" man it was severe; but Rossini did all that was expected of him to perfection, and ended by marrying the prima donna—which Barbaja had not bargained for at all.

Mademoiselle Colbran, the future Madame Rossini, was a great beauty, in the queenly style—dark hair, brilliant eyes, imposing demeanour. One would think she must already have seen her best days when Rossini first met her at Naples in 1815; for she was born at Madrid in 1785. But only women of the happiest organisation succeed as great dramatic singers; and Mademoiselle Colbran seems to have preserved youthfulness and beauty of voice, and doubtless, therefore, of person, until long afterwards.

Mademoiselle Colbran studied under Pareja, Marinelli, and Crescentini, and made her début with success at Paris in 1801, together with the celebrated violinist, Rode. Rossini wrote as many as ten parts for her, including those of *Desdemona*, *Elcia* ("Mosé in Egitto"), *Elena* ("Donna del Lago"), *Zelmira*, and *Semiramide*.

Fortunately and unfortunately for her, Mademoiselle Colbran's name was constantly mixed up with political questions, and was at one time quite a party-word among the royalists at Naples. Those who admired the king made a point of applauding his favourite singer. A gentleman from England asked a friend one night at the San Carlo theatre how he liked Mademoiselle Colbran.

"Like her? I am a Royalist," was the reply.

Stendhal was *not* a Royalist, and, in opposition to Carpani, his ordinary unacknowledged authority on all matters connected with Rossini's name, did not much admire Mademoiselle Colbran's voice, which, he says, "began to deteriorate about the year 1816"—the year after Rossini's arrival at Naples.

When the Revolutionists gained the upper hand, Mademoiselle Colbran used to get hissed; but the

discomfiture of the popular party was always followed by renewed triumphs for the singer.

Then the anti-Royalists, afraid to express their disapprobation openly, would leave the theatre in a body, pretending that Mademoiselle Colbran sang out of tune.

One can guess what Rossini's own politics must have been, from his temperament. Plots and stratagems were not to his taste. He had "music in his soul," and a horror of discord.

Nevertheless, overtaken by a revolutionary movement just as he was about to leave Bologna to enter upon his new duties at Naples, he could not refuse to compose a hymn in honour of Italian liberty. Indeed, without having the least affection for brawlers and Red Republicans, Rossini may all the same have felt an antipathy for the Austrian domination in Italy. Without entering too far into this profound and really inscrutable question, it may be enough to mention that Rossini's cantata, or hymn, of the year 1815, gained for its composer some reputation as an Italian patriot.

But this was nothing to the fame he derived

from a little transaction he was reported to have had with the Austrian governor of Bologna, to whom he had to apply for permission to leave the town.

The patriotic hymn had been sung day and night at Bologna until the arrival of the Austrians, without its being generally known as the work of Rossini. The Austrian governor was a great dilettante, and rather piqued himself on his musical knowledge; so, on going to him for a passport, Rossini, with whose name the general was, of course, familiar, presented to him a piece of music set to verses full of enthusiasm on behalf of the Austrians.

The governor read the words, and approved. He looked at the music with the eye of a connoisseur, and approved more than ever. He called to one of his secretaries to make out Rossini's passport forthwith, thanked the composer cordially for his attention, and in wishing him farewell, informed him that the music should be executed that very afternoon by the military band.

Rossini's anthem in praise of Austria and paternal government was soon arranged for the regimental

orchestra, and the same evening was played in the market-place before a large concourse of curious amateurs.

The townspeople knew that they were about to hear their patriotic hymn. Its performance was decidedly effective; but Rossini had started some hours before, and the musical governor had no opportunity of renewing to him the expression of his thanks.

If any one doubts the truth of this story, let him refer to the list of Rossini's works, from which he will see that Rossini did really write a patriotic cantata in the year 1815.

CHAPTER II.

ELISABETTA—ROSSINI'S DÉBUT AT NAPLES.

In *Elisabetta* Mademoiselle Colbran obtained the first of the numerous triumphs for which she was to be indebted to Rossini. The work was founded on the subject of "Kenilworth," and it is satisfactory to know that the libretto was from the pen of Signor Smith, a gentleman of unmistakable origin settled at Naples. Amy Robsart loses her beautiful name in the opera and is called *Matilda;* but then Signor Smith had not taken his story direct from Sir Walter's novel. He had adapted it from a French melodrama.

The cast of the opera was admirable, the principal parts being assigned to Mademoiselle Colbran, Mademoiselle Dardanelli, Nozzari, and Garcia. An English dilettante, a great admirer of Mademoiselle Colbran, obtained correct copies from London for the costume of *Queen Elizabeth;* and the success of

the prima donna, both as an actress and as a singer, was most remarkable.

The Neapolitans had not heard a note of Rossini's music. The stories of his great success in the north of Italy had reached them from time to time; but there was nothing to prove that this success was deserved. The composer, of whose merits the Milanese and the Venetians were so full, had not been tested at Naples, and the composer who has not been tested at Naples has yet to make a name. If the Neapolitan public was not prepared to applaud Rossini merely on the recommendation of the Milanese, the professors of the Conservatories, where he had never studied, were quite ready to criticise him very severely, and had made up their minds beforehand that he was not a musician of any learning.

Rossini treated the Neapolitan audience to the overture he had written the year before at Milan for "Aureliano in Palmira," and which was to be presented to the public of Rome the year afterwards as fit preface to "Il Barbiere." The brilliant symphony was naturally liked, though, if the Neapolitans had known that it was originally

written for "Aureliano in Palmira," they, perhaps, would not have applauded it quite so much.

The first piece in the opera was a duet for Leicester and his young wife in the minor, described by Stendhal as "very original." The effect of the duet was to confirm the audience in the good opinion they had already formed of the composer, who, so far as Naples was concerned, was now only making his début. The finale to the first act, in which the principal motives of the overture occur, raised the enthusiasm of the audience to the highest pitch. "All the emotions of serious opera with no tedious interval between," such was the phrase in which the general verdict of the Neapolitan public was expressed.

Mademoiselle Colbran's great success, however, was yet to come. It was achieved in the first scene of the second act, when an interview between *Elizabeth* (in her historical costume from London) and *Matilda* is made the subject of a grand scene and duet; and again in the finale to the second, described by the critics of the period as one of the finest Rossini ever wrote.

Mademoiselle Colbran's solo, "Bell' alme generose,"

in which she forgives and unites the lovers, is a brilliant show-piece, written for the display of all the best points in the prima donna's singing. "A catalogue of the qualities of a fine voice" it was called, and Mademoiselle Colbran's voice was at that time magnificent.

It was objected to the solo that it was not in keeping with the situation, being very grand, but entirely devoid of pathos. Such remarks, however, as these were not made until after the performance. Rossini had aimed at success through a very successful prima donna, and he had attained it.

"Elisabetta," though it contained much beautiful music, was not one of Rossini's best operas, and owing perhaps to the distribution of parts it has not been much played out of Italy, nor elsewhere than at Naples. For instance, the parts of *Leicester* and *Norfolk* are both given to tenors. If Rossini had been distributing the characters according to his own ideas, as he was afterwards able to carry them out, he would certainly have made the treacherous *Norfolk* a baritone or a bass; the position of the lover, *Leicester*, as tenor being of course quite unassailable. But Rossini had to write for a par-

ticular company, and there was no bass singer at the San Carlo capable of taking first parts.

Indeed it was still a conventional rule that in opera seria leading personages should not be represented by the bass, who was kept systematically in the background. Rossini was the basso's friend, not only in regard to opera seria, but also as to operas of mezzo carattere, such as "La Cenerentola," "La Gazza Ladra," and "Torvaldo e Dorliska." It is entirely to Rossini and his music that Galli, Lablache, and so many distinguished baritones and basses, owe their reputation.

The company at the San Carlo, though without a leading basso, included at this time three admirable tenors—Davide, Nozzari, and Garcia; and the two latter appeared together in "Elisabetta." This opera is the first in which Rossini accompanies recitative with the stringed quartet in lieu of the piano and double bass of former Italian composers. The score of "Otello" is the one usually cited (by M. Fétis, M. Castil Blaze, among other writers) as first exhibiting this important substitution.

CHAPTER III.

ROSSINI VISITS ROME—TORVALDO E DORLISKA.

AFTER the success of "Elisabetta," Rossini went to Rome, where he was engaged to write two works for the carnival of 1816. On the 26th of December, 1815, he produced at the Teatro Valle, "Torvaldo e Dorliska;" composed for Remorini and Galli, the two best bass singers of the day, Donzelli, the celebrated tenor, and Madame Sala, a prima donna of great reputation, who, it is interesting to know, was the mother of our distinguished author and journalist, Mr. George Augustus Sala.

But though the singers were excellent, the orchestra was composed of very indifferent musicians, most of whom were workmen and petty shopkeepers engaged during the day in the pursuit of their trade. The first clarinet was a barber, who habitually shaved Rossini. In proof of the composer's admirable presence of mind, it is narrated

that, annoyed and irritated as he was at the rehearsals by the inability of the band to execute his music correctly, he never once said a severe thing to the first clarinet. He remonstrated with him very gently the next morning after the operation of shaving had been safely performed.

Altogether it is not astonishing that the opera was received rather coldly, or at least not with sufficient warmth to satisfy Rossini. On "Sigismondo" being hissed at Venice, Rossini had sent his mother a drawing of a *fiasco;* this time he forwarded her a sketch of a little bottle or *fiaschetto.*

"Torvaldo e Dorliska," however, must have been an opera of some mark even among the operas of Rossini. It was received at Paris, in 1825, for the début of Mademoiselle Marietta Garcia, the future Malibran, and the composer borrowed from it the motive of the magnificent letter duet in "Otello." The moderate success of the work is partly to be explained by the poorness of the libretto—the production, however, of a man who, immediately afterwards, furnished Rossini with one of the best opera books ever written.

"Torvaldo e Dorliska" and "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" were produced simultaneously; and the little attention paid to the former, may partly no doubt be explained by the immense, though not in the first instance uncontested, success of the latter.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUMARCHAIS, PAISIELLO, AND ROSSINI.

At Rome, where no opera reflecting directly or indirectly on the Roman Catholic religion and the rights of princes, or inculcating patriotism, or trifling with morality, or touching in any way upon anything that concerns the Papal Court, is permitted; where, consequently, neither "Les Huguenots," nor "Guillaume Tell," nor "Lucrezia Borgia," nor "La Traviata," can be played in the dramatic shape naturally belonging to them; the authorities were as scrupulous with regard to the choice of subjects in Rossini's time as they are now.

If the natural instincts of despotic governments have always led them to favour operatic performances, they have done so on the very reasonable condition that nothing against themselves or their allies, the priesthood, should be introduced into the works represented. Thus "Le Prophète" becomes

"L'Assedio di Gand" at St. Petersburgh, "Lucrezia Borgia" "La Rinegata" at Rome, where the Italians at the Court of Pope Alexander the Sixth are metamorphosed into Turks.

Auber's "Muette de Portici" and Donizetti's "Martiri" were both proscribed at Naples (the "Muette" above all!). Even at Paris the performances of "Gustave," after the first production of the work, were suddenly stopped; and Verdi, treating the same subject for the San Carlo, was forced by the Neapolitan censorship to make the action of the piece take place at Boston in the United States.

Several dramas had been suggested to the Roman censorship, when at last the unpolitical plot of the "Barber of Seville" was proposed and accepted. The censor (who could have known little of Beaumarchais) thought it impossible such a subject could be made a vehicle for the introduction of political allusions.

All, however, that Rossini wanted was a well-planned "book" for musical purposes, and he found precisely what suited his genius in the "Barber of Seville."

In a literary point of view, the "Marriage of Figaro" is no doubt superior to its predecessor the "Barber;" but notwithstanding the eminently lyrical character of the page in the former work, the "Barber of Seville" is the best adapted for musical setting. It was as a pamphlet, rather than as a comedy, that "Le Mariage de Figaro" obtained its immense success in Paris, and *Figaro's* wit cannot be reproduced in music. Gaiety, however, is as much a musical as a literary quality, and the gaiety of Beaumarchais' versatile irrepressible hero is admirably expressed, with even increased effect, in Rossini's "Barbiere."

It would be rendering no service to Rossini to compare him with Mozart, whom he himself regarded as the greatest of dramatic composers.* But Rossini's genius is very much akin to that of Beaumarchais; whereas that of Mozart (to the disadvantage certainly of Beaumarchais) was not. Rossini is Beaumarchais in music; Beaumarchais is not Mozart in literature.

No wonder that "Le Barbier de Séville" has

* See Ferdinand Hiller's Conversations with Rossini.

been found so eminently suitable for musical treatment. Beaumarchais, who had strong views on the subject of the musical drama, and who was himself a good musician,* had in the first instance designed it as a libretto.

The subject of "Le Barbier de Séville" is manifestly taken from Molière's "Sicilien;" but the bare skeleton of the drama, as Beaumarchais himself points out, is common to innumerable works.

"An old man† is in love with his ward, and proposes to marry her; a young man succeeds in forestalling him, and the same day makes her his wife under the very nose and in the house of the guardian." That is the subject of the "Barber of Seville," capable of being made with equal success into a tragedy, a comedy, a drama, an opera, &c. What but that is Molière's "Avare"?—what but that is "Mithridates"? The genus to which a piece belongs depends less upon the fundamental nature of the subject than upon the details and the manner in which it is presented."

* Beaumarchais gave music lessons to Louis XV.'s daughters. To put forward a more positive proof of his acquirements in this art, he composed the incidental music of his own dramas.

† Préface du "Barbier de Seville," 1775.

Beaumarchais goes on to say what his original intention had been in regard to the simple subject of a ward carried away by her lover from beneath the nose of her guardian. "How polite of you," a lady had said to him, "to take your piece to the Théâtre Français, when I have no box except at the Italian Theatre! Why did you not make an opera of it? They say it was your first idea. The piece is well suited to music."

The author of "Le Barbier de Séville" explains why he abandoned his original intention. He had doubts on the subject of the form and general treatment of opera which, to the neglect of the melodic portion of the work, ought, he considered, to be assimilated to the spoken drama of real life; (the end of which theory, carried out to its extreme consequences, would be to substitute recitative for singing, speaking for recitative—annihilation of the musical drama, in short).

Five years afterwards, in the year 1780, Paisiello proved practically how well Beaumarchais' "Barbier de Séville" was adapted to musical setting. Beaumarchais heard it, and was much pleased. What would his delight have been could he have listened

to the "Barbiere" of Rossini—and with Adelina Patti in the part of *Rosina!*

Rossini was not one of those unconscious men of genius who are unable to judge of the merit of their own works. He certainly never expressed too high an opinion of them, and latterly used to say that his music had grown old—as if the "Barber of Seville" could grow old. But he knew the "Barber" to be one of his happiest, as it certainly was one of his most spontaneous, productions; and whichever of his works he may have considered the best, he thought the "Barber" the most likely to endure.

"The third act of 'Otello,'" he once said, "the second act of 'Guillaume Tell,' and the whole of 'Il Barbiere,' will perhaps live;"* and there are reasons why, independently of its musical worth, the "Barber" will in all probability still be played when the few other operas of Rossini which still keep the stage are no longer represented. It is composed on a firm scaffolding, unlike that of "Guillaume Tell," which very soon broke down, and has never been

* Words quoted by M. de St. Georges in his speech at Rossini's funeral.

put together again in a durable dramatic form The libretto has not to contend with the impression left by an unapproachable masterpiece on the same subject, as in the case of "Otello." Finally, the comedy on which it is founded is not only a masterpiece in a purely dramatic sense, it is moreover essentially a drama for music, and for just such music as Rossini loved to write, and wrote to perfection. There is nothing more felicitous in all operatic setting than *Basilio's* air, the crescendo of which exists as much in Beaumarchais's prose as in Rossini's music.

Indeed, *Don Basile's* little essay on the efficacy of calumny, read for the first time by any one already acquainted with Rossini's musical version, would seem to have been directly suggested by the music. The elegance and distinction of *Almaviva* are the same in the opera as in the comedy; and all the gaiety of Beaumarchais's "Figaro" lives again in Rossini's music, in a sublimated form.

Rossini was not so fond of writing prefaces as Beaumarchais; but he departed from his ordinary rule in the case of "The Barber," and has told us the exact circumstances under which it occurred to him to take for his subject an admirable comedy

which Paisiello had already made into an opera thirty-five years before.

Paisiello's opera had been played all over Europe, and it has been mentioned that the curious in musical antiquities may from time to time hear it even now at the Fantaisies Parisiennes. It is not nearly so full of music as Rossini's work, but it contains seven very interesting pieces,—*Almaviva's* solo; *Don Basile's* air—a setting of the passage on calumny, as in the modern "Barbiere;" an air for *Bartholo;* a comic trio, in which two fantastic and episodical characters (wisely omitted by Rossini), *La Jeunesse* and *L'Eveillé*, respectively sneeze and yawn in presence of *Rosina's* guardian; a very ingenious trio, based on the incidents of the letter; a duet, in which the disguised *Almaviva*, on arriving to give his music lesson, is received by *Don Bartholo;* and a quintet, in which *Don Basilio*, accused of fever, is sent hastily to bed—the *buona sera* scene, which Rossini took good care to preserve.

Rossini is said to have felt rather embarrassed when the impresario of the Argentina opera told him that the governor of Rome saw no objection

to his setting "The Barber of Seville" to music. Not that any rule of etiquette forbade him to take a subject already treated by another composer; Metastasio's best libretti have been set over and over again by innumerable composers. From the very beginning of opera, the legend of Orpheus, the story of Dido's abandonment, have been treated by almost all composers, including Rossini himself, who composed cantatas on both these subjects. Piccinni and Sacchini had both composed music twice to the "Olimpiade;" and Paisiello did not enjoy, probably did not claim, any special right of property in Beaumarchais' "Barbier de Séville."

Nevertheless, Paisiello had put his mark on the work. His "Barbiere" was celebrated throughout Italy, and Rossini thought it only polite on his part as a young beginner (he was then twenty-three years of age) to write to the venerable maestro (Paisiello was seventy-four years of age), to ask his permission to re-set "The Barber."

The venerable maestro, who had not been over-pleased at the success of "Elisabetta," thought it would be a good plan to let his youthful rival

attack a subject which, according to Paisiello, had already received its definite musical form, and wrote to him from Naples, giving him full permission to turn Beaumarchais' "Barbier de Seville" once more into an opera.

CHAPTER V.

"THE BARBER OF SEVILLE."

ROSSINI had engaged to supply two operas for Rome, both to be produced during the carnival of 1816. The first, "Torvaldo e Dorliska," was duly finished and brought out at the commencement of the carnival. The same day, December 26th, 1815, Rossini signed an agreement with the manager, Cesarini, by which he bound himself to furnish the second work on the 20th of January following. The brothers Escudier, in their valuable "Life of Rossini,"* have published this agreement, which is worth reproducing, if only to show under what pressure Rossini was sometimes obliged to write—under what pressure he was able to write.

Here, then, is the contract in compliance with which Rossini produced, almost improvised, his masterpiece, "The Barber of Seville."

* Rossini sa vie et ses œuvres, par les frères Escudier.

"Nobil teatro di Torre Argentina.

"*Dec.* 26, 1815.

"By the present act, drawn up privately between the parties, the value of which is not thereby diminished, and according to the conditions consented to by them, it has been stipulated as follows:—

"Signor Puca Sforza Cesarini, manager of the above-named theatre, engages Signor maestro Gioachino Rossini for the next carnival season of the year 1816; and the said Rossini promises and binds himself to compose, and produce on the stage, the second comic drama to be represented in the said season at the theatre indicated, and to the libretto which shall be given to him by the said manager, whether this libretto be old or new. The maestro Rossini engages to deliver his score in the middle of the month of January, and to adapt it to the voices of the singers; obliging himself, moreover, to make, if necessary, all the changes which may be required as much for the good execution of the music as to suit the capabilities or exigencies of the singers.

"The maestro Rossini also promises and binds

himself to be at Rome, and to fulfil his engagement, not later than the end of December of the current year, and to deliver to the copyist the first act of his opera, quite complete, on the 20th of January, 1816. The 20th of January is mentioned in order that the partial and general rehearsals may be commenced at once, and that the piece may be brought out the day the director wishes, the date of the first representation being hereby fixed for about the 5th of February. And the maestro Rossini shall also deliver to the copyist at the time wished his second act, so that there may be time to make arrangements and to terminate the rehearsals soon enough to go before the public on the evening mentioned above; otherwise the maestro Rossini will expose himself to all losses, because so it must be, and not otherwise.

"The maestro Rossini shall, moreover, be obliged to direct his opera according to the custom, and to assist personally at all the vocal and orchestral rehearsals as many times as it shall be necessary, either at the theatre or elsewhere, at the will of the director; he obliges himself also to assist at the three first representations, to be given consecutively,

and to direct the execution at the piano; and that because so it must be, and not otherwise. In reward for his fatigues the director engages to pay to the maestro Rossini the sum and quantity of four hundred Roman scudi as soon as the three first representations which he is to direct at the piano shall be terminated.*

"It is also agreed that in case of the piece being forbidden, or the theatre closed by the act of the authority, or for any unforeseen reason, the habitual practice, in such cases, at the theatres of Rome and of all other countries, shall be observed.

"And to guarantee the complete execution of this agreement, it shall be signed by the manager, and also by the maestro Gioachino Rossini; and, in addition, the said manager grants lodging to the maestro Rossini, during the term of the agreement, in the same house that is assigned to Signor Luigi Zamboni."

Rossini, then, for composing the "Barber of

* M. Azevedo (G. Rossini sa vie et ses œuvres par A. Azevedo) says that "Rossini, consulted as to the correctness of these figures, thought there must be an error of 100 scudi. He was under the impression that he had only received 300 scudi for the "Barber."

Seville," received not quite eighty pounds, together with a lodging in the house occupied by Signor Luigi Zamboni—the future Figaro.

It may be thought that he at least got something for the copyright of the music? He got nothing for the copyright of the music. He did not even take the trouble to get it engraved; and two of the pieces, the overture (for which the overture to "Aureliano in Palmira" was afterwards substituted), and the scene of the music lesson (originally treated as a concerted piece), were lost.

Rossini wrote his operas for stage representation, and thought no more of their publication by means of the press than did Shakspeare and Molière of the publication of their plays. Indeed, the first appearance of a complete edition of Rossini's operas was to Rossini himself a surprise, and by no means an agreeable one.

He had, in fact, enough to do in producing his works; and, practically, had obtained for them all he could get when he had once been paid by the theatre. What he sold to the manager was the right of representation for two years; after which

he had no right of any kind in his works. Any one might play them, any one might engrave them.

One year after the production of a new opera, the composer had the right to take back the original score from the theatre; and this Rossini sometimes neglected to do, or, in the case of the "Barber," the two missing pieces would not have been lost.

From the publishers who engraved his works, and made large sums of money by selling them, he never, as long as he remained in Italy, received a farthing.

When Rossini signed his agreement with Cesarini he had not the least idea what the libretto furnished to him would be. The manager had to arrange that matter with the censor before consulting the composer at all. Rossini had bound himself to set whatever was given to him, "new or old;" and it was, perhaps, fortunate that he had not left himself the right of refusing the admirable subject which Cesarini proposed to him a few days afterwards.

The statement that Rossini wrote the whole of the "Barber of Seville" in thirteen days belongs originally to Stendhal. Castil-Blaze* says one month.

* Théâtres Lyriques de Paris :—Histoire du Théâtre Italien.

It is certain the work did not occupy the composer near a month, and he really seems to have completed it in about a fortnight.

On the 26th December, when the agreement was signed, there was no libretto, and Rossini had not yet finished with "Torvaldo e Dorliska," which was produced on the evening of the 26th. On that evening, and the two following ones, Rossini had to direct the execution of his new work. He was not free then until the 29th; but he was not bound to supply the first act—more than half the opera, allowing for the length and musical importance of the finale—before Jan. 20th. The second act was to be furnished to the manager "at the time wished," and he certainly would not have desired to have it many days later than Jan. 20th, inasmuch as the opera had to be presented to the public on Feb. 5th.

Rossini, then, may have worked at the "Barber of Seville" from December 29th to January 24th, which would allow for the rehearsals just the time ordinarily required at the Italian theatres—twelve days. He must have composed the opera in less than a month, and he may, as Stendhal says, and as M. Azevedo repeats, apparently on Stendhal's authority, have

finished it in thirteen days' time, for it is certain that some days were lost in choosing a subject, or rather in getting the choice approved by the Roman authorities.

At last, when the "Barber of Seville" had been decided upon by the manager and the censor, Rossini would only consent on condition that an entirely new libretto should be prepared for him. The construction of the new libretto was entrusted to Sterbini, the poet of "Torvaldo e Dorliska," and as no time was to be lost, the composer suggested that he should take up his quarters in "the house assigned to Luigi Zamboni."

In this remarkable establishment, the composer, the librettist, and the original Figaro lived together for, say a fortnight, while the masterpiece was being manufactured.

For materials Rossini and his poet had Beaumarchais' comedy and the libretto of Paisiello's opera; and this time, by way of exception, instead of composing the music piece by piece as the words were furnished to him, Rossini commenced by asking Sterbini to read to him Beaumarchais' comedy from beginning to end.

Il "Barbiere" has quite the effect of an improvisation corrected and made perfect; and it was, indeed, produced under the most favourable circumstances for unity and completeness. Rossini had made Sterbini promise to remain with him until the opera was finished, and as rapidly as the latter wrote the verses the former set them to music.

Paisiello's distribution of scenes was not adopted—was purposely avoided; though the great situations in the comedy are of course reproduced in both the operas. In the new version of the "Barber" the grotesque episodical figures of "la Jeunesse" and "l'Eveillé," which Paisiello had retained, are very properly omitted. Where recitative would have been employed by the old master, Rossini has substituted dialogue sustained by the orchestra, the current of melody which flows throughout the work being here transferred from the voices to the instruments. There are more musical pieces, and there is twice or three times as much music in the new "Barber" as in the old.

Fortunately Sterbini was an amateur poet unburdened with literary pride, and prepared to carry out the composer's ideas. Rossini not only kept up

with the librettist, but sometimes found himself getting in advance. He then suggested words for the music which he had already in his head. Some of the best pieces in "Il Barbiere," notably that of "La Calunnia," seem to have been directly inspired by Beaumarchais' eloquent, impetuous prose.

On the other hand, the famous "Largo al Fattotum," though equally replete with the spirit of Beaumarchais, may be said to owe something of its rhythm, and therefore something of its gaiety, to Sterbini's rattling verses. The librettist was in a happy vein that morning, and thought he had overwritten himself. He told Rossini to take what verses suited him and throw the rest aside. Rossini took them all and set them to the rapid, elastic light-hearted melody, which at once stamps the character of *Figaro*.

In the room where the two inventors were at work a number of copyists were employed, to whom the sheets of music were thrown one by one as they were finished. Doubtless the chief lodger, Luigi Zamboni, looked in from time to time to see how the part of *Figaro* was getting on.

Probably too the spirited impresario called occasionally to inquire how the work generally was progressing.

But whether or not Rossini received visits he certainly did not return them. Without taking it for granted, as M. Azevedo does, that the joint authors for thirteen days and nights had scarcely time to eat: and slept, when they could no longer keep their eyes open, on a sofa (they would have saved time in the end by taking their clothes off and going to bed), we may be quite sure that "Il Barbiere" is the result of one continuous effort—if to an act of such rapid spontaneous production the word effort can be applied.

Rossini is said to have told some one, that during the thirteen days which he devoted to the composition of the "Barber" (if Rossini really said "thirteen days" there is of course an end to the question of time), he did not get shaved.

"It seems strange," was the rather obvious reply, "that through the 'Barber,' you should have gone without shaving."

"If I had got shaved," explained Rossini, very characteristically, "I should have gone out, and if

I had gone out I should not have come back in time."

While Rossini was working and letting his beard grow, Paisiello was quietly taking measures to insure a warm reception for the new opera.

According to Stendhal, Rossini had received a distinct permission from Paisiello to reset "Il Barbiere," though, as a mere matter of etiquette, no such permission was necessary. M. Azevedo denies that Rossini wrote to Paisiello at all, though he also represents the old maestro as perfectly well informed on the subject of Rossini's labours, and very anxious to frustrate them.

One thing is certain, that Rossini, in sending his libretto to press, prefixed to it the following—

"ADVERTISEMENT TO THE PUBLIC.

"Beaumarchais' comedy, entitled the 'Barber of Seville, or the Useless Precaution,'* is presented at Rome in the form of a comic drama, under the title of 'Almaviva, or the Useless Precaution,' in order that the Public may be fully convinced of the

* In the avvertimento al pubblico the title of the comedy is given in Italian "Il Barbiere di Siviglia Ossia l'inutile precauzione."

sentiments of respect and veneration by which the author of the music of this drama is animated with regard to the celebrated Paisiello, who has already treated the subject under its primitive title.

"Himself invited to undertake this difficult task, the maestro Gioachino Rossini, in order to avoid the reproach of entering rashly into rivalry with the immortal author who preceded him, expressly required that the 'Barber of Seville' should be entirely versified anew, and also that new situations should be added for the musical pieces, which, moreover, are required by the modern theatrical taste, entirely changed since the time when the renowned Paisiello wrote his work.

"Certain other differences between the arrangement of the present drama and that of the French comedy above cited were produced by the necessity of introducing choruses, both for conformity with modern usage, and because they are indispensable for musical effect in so vast a theatre. The courteous public is informed of this beforehand, that it may also excuse the author of the new drama, who, unless obliged by these imperious circumstances, would never have ventured to intro-

duce the least change into the French work, already consecrated by the applause of all the theatres in Europe."

Beneath the title of the libretto was the following sub-title: "Comedy by Beaumarchais, newly versified throughout, and arranged for the use of the modern Italian musical theatre, by Cesare Sterbini, of Rome;" and the publication was sanctioned by the indispensable *imprimatur* of J. Della Porta, Patriarch of Constantinople. This patriarch *in partibus* was invested with the actual functions of theatrical censor.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE BARBER OF SEVILLE."—FIRST REPRESENTATION.

FIRST representations are a composer's battles. Rossini's hardest fight was at the first representation of the "Barber of Seville." For some reason not explained the Roman public were as ill disposed towards Sterbini, the librettist, as towards Rossini himself—who was simply looked upon as an audacious young man, for venturing to place himself in competition with the illustrious Paisiello.

Paisiello's work had grown old (as the preface to Rossini's libretto, with all its compliments, ingeniously points out), and it had ceased to be played. Perhaps for that very reason the Roman public continued to hold it in esteem. Rossini, all the same, was to be punished for his rashness, and he seems to have been hissed, not only without his work being heard, but before one note of it had

been played, and, according to M. Azevedo, before the doors were opened.

At least two original accounts have been published of the "Barber's" first presentation to the Roman public—one, the most copious, by Zanolini;* the other, the most trustworthy, by Madame Giorgi Righetti, who took a leading part in the performance on the stage. Madame Giorgi Righetti was the *Rosina* of the evening.

Garcia, the celebrated tenor, was the *Almaviva.*

The *Figaro* was our friend the chief lodger, Luigi Zamboni, who, after distinguishing himself on all the operatic stages in Europe, became, like Garcia, a singing master, and taught other *Figaros*, besides *Almavivas* and *Rosinas*, how to sing Rossini's music.

The original *Don Basilio* was Vitarelli; *Bartholo*, Botticelli.

The overture, an original work, written expressly for "Il Barbiere," and not the overture to "Aureliano in Palmira" afterwards substituted for it, was executed in the midst of a general murmuring, "such," remarks Zanolini, "as is heard on the

* L'Ape Italiana, Paris, 1836.

approach of a procession." Stendhal says that the Roman public recognised, or thought they recognised, in the overture the grumbling of the old guardian, and the lively remonstrances of his interesting ward. But he also says that the overture performed was that of "Aureliano;" probably he confounds two different representations. M. Azevedo thinks the original overture was lost through the carelessness of a copyist, but it is difficult to understand how, not only the composer's score, but also the orchestral parts, could have been lost in this manner. One thing is certain that on the opening night the overture met with but little attention.

The introduction, according to Stendhal, was not liked, but this can only mean that it was not heard.

The appearance of Garcia did not change the disposition of the public.

"The composer," says Madame Giorgi Righetti, "was weak enough to allow Garcia to sing beneath *Rosina's* balcony a Spanish melody of his own arrangement." Garcia maintained, that as the scene was in Spain, the Spanish melody would give the drama an appropriate local colour; but, unfortu-

nately, the artist who reasoned so well, and who was such an excellent singer, forgot to tune his guitar before appearing on the stage as *Almaviva*. He began the operation in the presence of the public; a string broke; the vocalist proceeded to replace it, but before he could do so laughter and hisses were heard from all parts of the house. The Spanish air, when Garcia was at last ready to sing it, did not please the Italian audience, and the pit listened to it just enough to be able to give an ironical imitation of it afterwards.

The audience could not hiss the introduction to *Figaro's* air; but when Zamboni entered, with another guitar in his hand, a loud laugh was set up, and not a phrase of "Largo al fattotum" was heard. When *Rosina* made her appearance in the balcony the public were quite prepared to applaud Madame Giorgi Righetti in an air which they thought they had a right to expect from her; but only hearing her utter a phrase which led to nothing, the expressions of disapprobation recommenced. The duet between *Almaviva* and *Figaro* was accompanied throughout with hissing and shouting. The fate of the work seemed now decided.

At length *Rosina* reappeared, and sang the cavatina which had so long been desired; for Madame Giorgi Righetti was young, had a fresh, beautiful voice, and was a great favourite with the Roman public. Three long rounds of applause followed the conclusion of her air, and gave some hope that the opera might yet be saved. Rossini, who was at the orchestral piano, bowed to the public, then turned towards the singer, and whispered, "Oh, natura!"

The entry of *Don Basilio*, now so effective, was worse than a failure the first night. Vitorelli's make up was admirable; but a small trap had been left open on the stage, at which he stumbled and fell. The singer had bruised his face terribly, and began his admirably dramatic air with his handkerchief to his nose. This in itself must have sufficed to spoil the effect of the music. Some of the audience, with preternatural stupidity, thought the fall and the subsequent, consequent application of the handkerchief to the face, was in the regular "business" of the part, and, not liking it, hissed.

The letter-duet miscarried partly, it appears,

through the introduction of some unnecessary incidents, afterwards omitted; but the audience were resolved to ridicule the work, and, as often happens in such cases, various things occurred to favour their pre-determination.

At the beginning of the magnificent finale a cat appeared on the stage, and with the usual effect. *Figaro* drove it one way, *Bartholo* another, and in avoiding *Basilio* it encountered the skirt of *Rosina*—behaved, in short, as a cat will be sure to behave mixed up in the action of a grand operatic finale. The public were only too glad to have an opportunity of amusing themselves apart from the comedy; and the opening of the finale was not listened to at all.

The noise went on increasing until the curtain fell. Then Rossini turned towards the public, shrugged his shoulders, and began to applaud. The audience were deeply offended by this openly-expressed contempt for their opinion, but they made no reply at the time.

The vengeance was reserved for the second act, of which not a note passed the orchestra. The hubbub was so great, that nothing like it was ever

heard at any theatre. Rossini in the meanwhile remained perfectly calm, and afterwards went home as composed as if the work, received in so insulting a manner, had been the production of some other musician. After changing their clothes, Madame Giorgi Righetti, Garcia, Zamboni, and Botticelli went to his house to console him in his misfortune. They found him fast asleep.

The next day he wrote the delightful cavatina, "Ecco ridente il cielo," to replace Garcia's unfortunate Spanish air. The melody of the new solo was borrowed from the opening chorus of "Aureliano in Palmira," written by Rossini, in 1814, for Milan, and produced without success; the said chorus having itself figured before in the same composer's "Ciro in Babilonia," also unfavourably received. Garcia read his cavatina as it was written, and sang it the same evening. Rossini, having now made the only alteration he thought necessary, went back to bed, and pretended to be ill, that he might not have to take his place in the evening at the piano. The charming melody which, in "Il Barbiere," is sung by Count *Almaviva* in honour of *Rosina*, is addressed by the

chorus in "Aureliano." to the spouse of the grand *Osiris*, "Sposa del Grande Osiride," &c.

At the second performance the Romans seemed disposed to listen to the work of which they had really heard nothing the night before. This was all that was needed to insure the opera's triumphant success. Many of the pieces were applauded; but still no enthusiasm was exhibited. The music, however, pleased more and more with each succeeding representation, until at last the climax was reached, and "Il Barbiere" produced those transports of admiration among the Romans with which it was afterwards received in every town in Italy, and in due time throughout Europe. It must be added, that a great many connoisseurs at Rome were struck from the first moment with the innumerable beauties of Rossini's score, and went to his house to congratulate him on its excellence. As for Rossini, he was not at all surprised at the change which took place in public opinion. He was as certain of the success of his work the first night, when it was being hooted, as he was a week afterwards, when every one applauded it to the skies.

The tirana composed by Garcia, "Se il mio

nome saper voi bramate," which he appears to have abandoned after the unfavourable manner in which it was received at Rome, was afterwards reintroduced into the "Barber" by Rubini. It is known that the subject of the charming trio "Zitti, Zitti" does not belong to Rossini—or, at least, did not till he took it. It may be called a reminiscence of Rossini's youth, being note for note the air sung by *Simon* in Haydn's "Seasons," one of the works directed by Rossini at Bologna when he was still a student at the Lyceum.

Finally, the original idea of the air sung by the duenna *Berta* is taken from a Russian melody which Rossini had heard from the lips of a Russian lady at Rome, and had introduced into his opera for her sake. It is melodious, and above all, lively—yet occurring at a point in the drama where, for a time, all action ceases, it came to be looked upon as a signal for ordering ices.

Rossini wrote a trio for the scene of the music lesson, which has been either lost or (more probably) set aside by successive *Rosinas* who have preferred to substitute a violin concerto, or a waltz, or a national ballad, or anything else that the daughter

of *Bartholo* would have been very likely to sing to her music-master. It is a pity that the trio cannot be recovered. *Rosina* might still sing a favourite air between the acts.

The original *Rosina*, by the way, Madame Giorgi Righetti, had a mezzo soprano voice; indeed, Rossini in Italy wrote none of his great parts for the soprano. When he first began to compose, the highest parts were taken by the sopranist, while the prima donna was generally a contralto—an arrangement somewhat suggestive of our burlesques, in which male parts are taken by women, female parts by men.

Rossini rose from the contralto (Madame Malanotte in "Tancredi," Madame Marcolini in "L'Italiana in Algeri") to the mezzo soprano (Madame Giorgi Righetti and Mademoiselle Colbran); but in his Italian operas, the part of *Matilda* in "Matilda di Sabran" is the only first part written for the soprano voice. *Amenaide*, the soprano of "Tancredi," is a lady of secondary importance, the chief female part being of course that of *Tancredi*.

M. Castil-Blaze has given an interesting account

of the various keys in which the chief solo pieces in "Il Barbiere" have been presented to the public. Of course Madame Giorgi Righetti sang *Rosina's* air in its original key, F. Madame Persiani and other sopranos sang it in G.

Figaro's air, written in C for Zamboni, is generally sung in B flat; Tamburini sang it in B natural. *Basilio's* air, "La Calunnia," generally sung in C, is written in D. *Bartholo's* air, written in E flat, used to be sung by Lablache in D flat.

These particulars may be interesting to those who believe in the abstract value of a normal diapason, and in the absolute character of keys. We have all heard the principal airs in "Il Barbiere" sung in the keys in which they were *not* written. We have seldom heard any of them sung in the keys in which Rossini wrote them; yet who can say that by these frequent, constant transpositions they lose anything of their original character—that *Figaro's* air, for instance, sounds mournful when sung in B flat?

CHAPTER VII.

OTELLO: FURTHER REFORMS IN OPERA SERIA.

WHILE Rossini was still at Rome the San Carlo theatre was destroyed by fire, but Barbaja's fortune was not invested in one opera-house alone. He had two theatres in hand, and the principal one being burnt down, nothing was easier than for his composer to fulfil the conditions of his engagement by working for the minor establishment.

First, however, Rossini had to write a piece for the Teatro dei Fiorentini—also at Naples—where two celebrated buffo singers, Pellegrini and Cassaccia, were performing with great success. He composed for them an operetta called "La Gazzetta," which was produced without much result in the summer of 1816.

Rossini now commenced an important work, which he had promised to Barbaja for the winter

season of the Teatro del Fondo. The company included all the best of the burnt-out singers from the San Carlo Theatre, Mademoiselle Colbran, Davide and Nozzare, the two tenors, and Benedetti, a newly-engaged bass.

Here the bass again moves a little step forward, but Benedetti was nothing by the side of the two brilliant tenors. *Iago*, in the operatic version of "Othello," is only a secondary character. *Otello* and *Roderigo* are two leading parts, and we may be sure that Barbaja, as an enterprising manager, having two popular tenors like Davide and Nozzare at his theatre, willing to appear together in the same opera, would have been very much shocked if his composer had objected to turn such a combination of talent to the best possible account.

Davide, as *Otello*, displayed much power; and his acting, equally with his singing, was praised by all who saw him. A French critic, M. Edouard Bertin, gives the following account of his performance in a letter dated 1823; the celebrated tenor had then been playing the part seven years:—

"Davide excites among the dilettanti of this town an enthusiasm and delight which could scarcely be

conceived without having been witnessed. He is a singer of the new school, full of mannerism, affectation, and display, abusing, like Martin, his magnificent voice, with its prodigious compass (three octaves comprised between four B flats). He crushes the principal motive of an air beneath the luxuriance of his ornamentation, and which has no other merit than that of difficulty conquered. But he is also a singer full of warmth, verve, expression, energy, and musical sentiment; alone he can fill up and give life to a scene; it is impossible for another singer to carry away an audience as he does, and when he will only be simple he is admirable; he is the Rossini of song. He is a great singer; the greatest I have ever heard. Doubtless the manner in which Garcia sings and plays the part of *Otello* is preferable, taking it altogether, to that of Davide. It is purer, more severe, more constantly dramatic; but, with all his faults, Davide produces more effect, a great deal more effect. There is something in him, I cannot say what, which, even when he is ridiculous, commands, entrances attention. He never leaves you cold, and when he does not move you he astonishes you; in a word, before hearing him, I did

not know what the power of singing really was. The enthusiasm he excites is without limits. In fact, his faults are not faults for Italians, who, in their opera seria, do not employ what the French call the tragic style, and who scarcely understand us when we tell them that a waltz or quadrille movement is out of place in the mouth of a *Cæsar*, an *Assur*, or an *Otello*. With them the essential thing is to please; they are only difficult on this point, and their indifference as to all the rest is really inconceivable; here is an example of it. Davide, considering apparently that the final duet of "Otello" did not sufficiently show off his voice, determined to substitute for it a duet from "Armida" ("Amor possente nome"), which is very pretty, but anything rather than severe. As it was impossible to kill *Desdemona* to such a tune, the Moor, after giving way to the most violent jealousy, sheathes his dagger, and begins in the most tender and graceful manner his duet with *Desdemona*, at the conclusion of which he takes her politely by the hand and retires, amidst the applause and bravos of the public, who seem to think it quite natural that the piece should finish in this manner, or, rather that it

should not finish at all; for after this beautiful dénouement the action is about as far advanced as it was in the first scene. We do not in France carry our love of music so far as to tolerate such absurdities as these, and perhaps we are right."

Lord Byron saw "Otello" at Venice soon after its first production. He speaks of it in one of his letters dated 1818, condemning and ridiculing the libretto, but praising the music and singing.

The chorus gains increased importance in "Otello." The successive entry of two choruses, each with a fine crescendo effect, in the finale to the first act, is one of the striking features in this magnificent musical scene. But, full of beautiful and very dramatic music as Rossini's opera decidedly is, it has the great disadvantage of reminding us constantly of what it does not resemble,—the "Othello" of Shakspeare. *Roderigo* is too much brought forward, *Iago* too much kept in the background; it is only when the part of *Iago* is given to such an

actor as Ronconi that it regains its true dramatic importance.

However, "Otello" is one of Rossini's finest works in the serious style. Each dramatic scene is one continuous piece of music, and the recitative, as in "Elisabetta," is accompanied by the orchestra. "Otello" marks the end of the interminable recitatives with an accompaniment of piano or piano and double bass by which the rare musical pieces were separated in the serious works of Rossini's predecessors. The Germans had abolished the pianoforte as an orchestral instrument long before, and Gluck had expelled it from the orchestra of the French Opera in the year 1774.

Instrumentation has of late years kept pace closely enough with the invention of new instruments, and orchestras are now similarly composed in Italy, France, Germany, and England—in short, throughout Europe. This was by no means the case when Rossini began to write for the stage, Italian orchestras by their constitution, if not by the skill of the executants, being at that time inferior to those of Germany, and even (in regard

to the variety of instruments) to those of France.

The modern orchestra, if we reckon the military band which is often introduced on the stage, and the organ which is sometimes heard at the back of the stage, includes every available instrument that is known except the piano; which is an orchestra on a reduced scale, but ineffective and useless as an orchestral unit in the midst of so many instruments of superior sonority. The piano, employed in France until the time of Gluck, in Italy until that of Rossini, for accompanying recitative, is now banished generally from the orchestra, though it occasionally figures as a sort of non-combatant at the conductor's desk, where it may serve at need to bring back an erring vocalist to the sense of musical propriety. Even in the "Barber of Seville" the piano to which *Rosina* sings her music lesson is dumb. *Almaviva* goes through the pantomime of a pianist, but the sound is the sound of the orchestra.

The history of some individual instruments has been written, notably that of the violin. But I know of no history of the orchestra,—say from the day

of Nebuchadnezzar to that of *Nabuchodonosore*,*—from sackbuts and psalteries to trombones and opheicleides, cornets, saxhorns, saxotubas, and all kinds of saxophonous instruments.

However, up to about the middle of the eighteenth century the Italian orchestra, to judge by Pergolese's "Serva Padrona," as executed in 1862 in Paris, consisted entirely of stringed instruments. Few of the wind instruments now used in orchestras were known, and of those that were known fewer still had been sufficiently perfected for artistic purposes. Hautboys and bassoons were the first wind instruments admitted into Italian orchestras to vary the monotony inseparable from the use of stringed instruments alone.

The clarinet was not invented until the end of the seventeenth century, and was not recognised until long afterwards, even in Germany, as an orchestral

* One of the worst puns ever made was made in verse on the production of Verdi's highly instrumental "Nabuchodonosore" at Paris in 1845. It is contained in the following quatrain :—

Vraiment l'affiche est dans son tort,
En faux on devrait la poursuivre :
Pourquoi nous annoncer *Nabuchodonos—or* ,
Quand c'est *Nabuchodonos—cuivre ?*

instrument. It was introduced into French orchestras towards the end of the eighteenth century. In Italy it was sparingly used, and never as a solo instrument until Rossini's time.

With the exception of hautboys and bassoons, no wind instrument seems to have come from the Italians. The so-called "German flute," as distinguished from the old flute with a mouth-piece, a sort of large flageolet, was perfected by the celebrated Quantz, the friend and music-master of Frederick the Great; and, like all wind instruments, it has been much improved during the present century.

The horn, known in England as the "French horn," in France, as the *cor de chasse*, was at first looked upon as an instrument to be sounded only in the woods and plains among dogs and horses. The Germans, not the French, made it available for orchestral purposes; but in Italy brass instruments of every description were long regarded as fit only for the use of sportsmen and soldiers. Wind instruments in wood were thought more tolerable, and after hautboys and bassoons, flutes and clarinets crept in,—the flute to be in time followed by its direct descendant, the piccolo.

„ Gluck invaded the orchestra of the French Opera with trombones, cymbals, and the big drum in the year 1774, when he at the same time ejected the harpsichord, the piano of the period. Thirteen years later Mozart's trombones in "Don Giovanni" were considered a novelty at the Italian Opera of Vienna.

With the exception of opheicleides, cornets-à-piston, and the large and constantly increasing family of saxhorns, Rossini, in his latest Italian Operas, used all the instruments that are known in the present day, and used them freely with all sorts of new combinations. It was not for nothing that he and his father had played the horn together when the young Rossini was gaining his earliest experience of orchestral effects. He was always faithful to his first instrument. "The art," says M. Fétis, "of writing parts for the horn, with the development of all its resources, is quite a new art, which Rossini, in some sort, created."

In looking over the score of "Otello," with Donizetti, 'Sigismondi,' the librarian of the Conservatory at Naples, is said to have complained of the promi-

nence given to the clarinets, and to have exclaimed with horror at the employment of horns and trombones without number. "Third and fourth horns!" he cried; "what does the man want? The greatest of our composers have always been content with two. Shades of Pergolese, of Leo, of Jomelli! How they must shudder at the bare mention of such a thing! Four horns! Are we at a hunting party? Four horns! Enough to blow us to perdition!" The old professor was still more shocked by "1°, 2°, 3° *tromboni*," which, according to an anecdote, the authenticity of which can scarcely be guaranteed, he mistook for "123" trombones.

The instrumentation of "Otello" is far more sonorous than that of "Tancredi;" but Rossini made a still more liberal use of the brass instruments in the "Gazza Ladra" overture, which again is surpassed by the march and chorus (with the military band on the stage) in the first act of "Semiramide."

Rossini must have been on the watch for new instruments, whereas, if his predecessors in Italy looked out for them, it was only with the view of keeping them out of the orchestra.

In "Semiramide," under the auspices of the composer, the key-bugle made its *début* at the Fenice of Venice in 1823. In 1829, in "Guillaume Tell," the same composer brought out the cornet-à-piston at the French Opera.

Since "Guillaume Tell," there has been no progress in dramatic music, but there has been further progress in instrumentation. At one moment the continued invasion of "the brass" seems to have startled Rossini himself. In 1834, when his young friend Bellini had just produced "I Puritani," Rossini, writing an account of the first performance to a friend at Milan, said of the celebrated duet for Tamburini and Lablache, with its highly military accompaniments, "I need not describe the duet for the two basses. You must have heard it at Milan." But neither Bellini nor Donizetti brought forward any new instruments.

In "Robert le Diable," Meyerbeer introduced a melody for four kettledrums. Kettledrums were never so treated before! In "Le Juif Errant," Halévy employed saxhorns to announce the Day of Judgment.

Nevertheless, the saxhorn turned out not to be

the last trump. The ingenious inventor had saxophones, saxotubes, and other instruments of sounding brass, with names beginning in Sax, to offer to Meyerbeer, the Belgian Guides, and the musical and military world in general. Perhaps there is no more splendid example of modern instrumentation than the march in the "Prophète," wherein every possible brass instrument is employed. If the benign Pergolese could hear it as executed by Mr. Costa's band or bands (for one is not enough), he would fancy himself in Jericho, with the walls coming down.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSSINI'S REPRODUCTIONS FROM HIMSELF.

"LA CENERENTOLA" belongs to the composite order of operatic architecture. But no canon has been set against self-robbery; and Rossini, who never professed any theory on the subject of dramatic expression in music, had the right to take a piece from one of his works which had failed, or which seemed already to have had its day, to place it in another which was just about to appear. This was his constant practice, and its justification is to be found in its success.

Of course Rossini had a system, and of course music *does* possess dramatic expression, up to a certain point. Figaro's air could not have been introduced into the trio of "Guillaume Tell;" the "Non piu mesta" of "Cenerentola" would not have seemed appropriate as the theme of the prayer in "Mosè."

And it is to be noticed, moreover, that when Rossini made his own adaptations from himself, he was always successful, whereas other composers, who have manufactured pasticcios with motives borrowed from Rossini, have always failed. "Robert Bruce," arranged by M. Carafa, with Rossini's sanction, but not under Rossini's superintendence, made no impression, and we have seen that Rossini quite mistrusted a M. Berettoni, who had constructed an opera called "Un Curioso Accidente," from pieces contained in the composer's early works. * This is not the place in which to speak of the shameful adaptations of Rossini's works produced in England, into which airs by nameless composers were introduced, and which were prefaced by absurd *pots pourris* called overtures, the work of the "conductor and composer" of the music attached to the theatre where Rossini was thus presented. The rule in regard to *pasticcio*-making is clear. It may be undertaken by the composer of the airs employed, but by no one else.

Rossini is by no means the only composer who has transferred themes (seldom pieces in their com-

* Page 21.

plete form) from one to another of his works. According to M. Blaze de Bury,* Meyerbeer laid some of his early operas under contribution for "Dinorah," which, perhaps for that reason, is so remarkably full of fresh spontaneous melody.

Auber enriched his "Fra Diavolo" in a similar manner, when he prepared it for the Italian stage. In the "Muette de Portici," again, the prayer is borrowed from a mass, the *barcarolle* from "Emma," the overture from "Le Maçon."

Even Gluck, the favourite composer of those who maintain not only that music should render the character of a dramatic situation, but that it can and ought to reflect the meaning of particular phrases,—even Gluck, in arranging his works for the French stage, turned constantly for musical material to the works of his early days.

Persons who are of opinion that Rossini's "Stabat Mater" is written in the operatic style, and that the airs of Handel's oratorios are not in the operatic style, may be interested to hear that "Lord, remember David," was originally composed for the opera of "Sosarme," where it is set to the words "Rendi

* Meyerbeer et son Temps.

l'Sereno al Ciglio," and that "Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty," first appears in the opera of "Rodelinda," as "Dove sei amato bene."

That these changes have been made with success proves that there is no such thing as definite expression in music. The music of an impassioned love song may be adapted to the words of a prayer, and will only seem inappropriate to those who may chance to remember the words to which it was originally composed. A positive feeling of joy or of grief, of exultation or of depression, of liveliness or of solemnity, can be expressed by musical means, without the assistance of words, but not mixed feelings, into which several shades of sentiment enter. At least not with definiteness; though, once indicated by the words, they will obtain from music the most admirable colours, which will even appear to have been invented expressly and solely for them.

Rossini did not go back to the operas of his youth for motives, pieces and overtures merely, as is sometimes supposed, to save himself trouble, though in one or two exceptional cases, when much pressed for time, he may have done something of the kind; but his principle was, when he had once produced a

really good piece, not to let it be lost—not to let it perish through the fault of an intolerable libretto.

A libretto is sometimes so bad that the best music in the world will not carry it off: in vain the composer gives it wings, it will *not* fly. In such a case as that, it was Rossini's practice to disunite his living music from the dead body of the drama to which it had been attached, and to present it again to the public in what he thought would prove a happier alliance. If, again, the union was a failure, he had no hesitation in marrying his music to more or less immortal verse for the third time. The third time the result was invariably happy; witness the air, "Miei Rampolli," which was tried first in "La Pietra del Paragone," and secondly in "La Gazzetta," before it at last found its proper place in "La Cenerentola;" and two of the finest pieces in the "Barber of Seville," the overture which had previously belonged in succession to "Aureliano in Palmira" and "Elisabetta;" and *Almaviva's* air, "Ecco ridente il Cielo," a treasure saved from the wreck of "Aureliano in Palmira," and which had before been picked out of the ruins of "Ciro in Babilonia."

If Rossini had only pursued his laudable system half way, neither the overture to the "Barber" nor the Count's *cavatina* would now have been heard; and his happiest, if not his greatest, work would have lost two of its most brilliant ornaments.

It must be observed that Rossini had never the slightest idea of allowing the same piece to belong to two different operas. "I get enraged," he once said, speaking of the publication of his complete works, "when I think of that edition which contains every opera I have composed. The public will often find the same piece in different works, for I thought I had a right to take those which seemed to me the best from the operas which had failed, and place them in the new ones that I was composing. When an opera was hissed, I looked upon it as utterly dead, and now I find everything brought to life again."*

The libretto of "Cenerentola" is an adaptation from Etienne's "Cendrillon." Rossini composed the opera for the Teatro Valle, at Rome, where it was produced on the 26th December, 1817, nearly

* See "La Revue de Paris," March 1, 1856.

one year after the "Barber," a few months after "Otello" (winter season of 1816), and a few months before "La Gazza Ladra" (spring season of 1817). From the winter of 1815 to the spring of 1816, Rossini produced six operas, including the four masterpieces just named. The two minor works were "Torvaldo e Dorliska," and "La Gazzetta." "La Cenerentola" was not quite so successful as "Il Barbiere," and no wonder, for though crammed full of beautiful music, it is not all of one piece like its predecessor at Rome, to which, moreover, "Cinderella" is very inferior in dramatic movement, and as a play generally.

The "Barber," too, lends itself more readily to that perfect execution which it has so often attained.

It contains five excellent parts, each essentially necessary to the intrigue, and only one inferior character, who only appears for a few minutes during a necessary pause in the action, to sing a very pretty air. In regard to the two heroines, *Rosina* is certainly the most attractive, though *Cinderella* ought to be (but somehow is not) more sympathetic.

Indeed, as a purely theatrical part, a part for stage

display, that of *Rosina* is quite unrivalled, and none is better adapted for the re-appearance of a favourite singer coming back to the scene of previous triumphs. *Rosina* makes her first entry on the balcony, as if only to receive the applause and congratulations of the public on her return. She has then to make a second entry, to sing a beautiful and very effective cavatina, and finally she has an admirable opportunity for gratifying the audience in the scene of the music lesson, by introducing some air which she knows, for national or sentimental reasons, or both, to be particularly agreeable to them.

Cenerentola, however, is far from being an insignificant heroine, and Madame Giorgi-Righetti sang the music admirably, as a year before she had sung that of *Rosina.* She was especially applauded for her brilliant delivery of the final rondo, "Non piu mesta." This was the fourth and last time that Rossini concluded an opera with an air of display for the *prima donna.* It seemed to him, no doubt, that the device had now been sufficiently employed—which, however, did not force his successors to be of the same opinion.

As to the borrowed pieces in "Cenerentola," the history of the air "Miei Rampolli" has been already traced through two operas. It belonged originally to "La Pietra del Paragone," together with the duet "Un Soave non so che," the drinking chorus, and the burlesque proclamation of the Baron. The sestet, the stretta of the finale, the duet "Zitto, Zitto," were taken from "Il Turco in Italia."

"Cenerentola" was the last of the great *prima donna* parts which Rossini composed for the contralto voice. He wrote nothing more, then, either for Madame Giorgi-Righetti, or for Madame Marcolini, the original *Tancredi.*

"La Cenerentola" seems to have been intended as a pendent to "Il Barbiere," and at one time almost rivalled that work in popularity. Sontag, Malibran, Alboni, have appeared with brilliant success in the part of the heroine, which, like those of *Rosina* and *Isabella,* has often been sung by sopranos since the general dethronement of the contralto by the soprano voice in principal characters. But of late years this opera has seldom been played, and in England not since Madame Alboni's last series of performances at Her Majesty's Theatre.

CHAPTER IX.

"LA GAZZA LADRA": THE CONTRALTO VOICE.

THE Patriarch of Moscow, arrayed in all his splendour, was about to lay the foundation stone of a new church, when his consecrated trowel, formed of massive gold, could nowhere be found. Dreadful things happened. No one could say what had become of the precious instrument. The question was put to the nobles, the merchants were put to the question, the peasants were knouted and sent to Siberia; still the golden trowel was not forthcoming.

At last the Tsar died of grief; the great bell of Ivan Velikoi, the sound of which is never heard except on the most solemn occasions, was about to be tolled, when the aged bell-ringer, on ascending the tower, was much startled at startling a magpie which had turned the sacred belfry into a receptacle for stolen goods. In the midst of the hoard accu-

mulated by the thievish bird, which included a fur cap, a wooden spoon, a pair of goloshes, a hymn-book, and a tenpenny nail, the long-lost golden trowel was discovered.

The Patriarch, now advanced in years, laid the foundation stone of the new church. He then pronounced a curse, the terms of which are unfit for publication, on the magpies of Moscow, and forbad them to approach the holy city within a distance of forty versts. Accordingly, no magpie is ever seen in Moscow—except, of course, on the stage, when "La Gazza Ladra" is performed.

Wherever the legend on which the story of the Maid and the Magpie may have come from—and its birthplace is doubtless much further east than Moscow—the drama or melodrama of domestic, military, and judicial interest on which Rossini's "Gazza Ladra" is founded, belongs, like the dramatic originals of "Il Barbiere" and "La Cenerentola," to the French. The French playwrights, if not good librettists themselves, are certainly cunning contrivers of plots on which good libretti may be founded. "Le Nozze di Figaro," "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," are both derived from Beau-

marchais; "La Cenerentola" from Etienne; "La Sonnambula" from Scribe; "Lucrezia Borgia," "Ernani," and "Rigoletto," from Victor Hugo. "Linda di Chamouni" is only "La Grace de Dieu;" "La Gazza Ladra," "La Pie Voleuse" in another form. If there should ever be a recognised national division of literary labour in the world, England, considering how much the works of Richardson, Fielding, Scott, Bulwer, Dickens, Thackeray have been read on the continent, may perhaps supply the novels; but the French already write plays in every shape for the whole world.

Mademoiselle Jenny Vertpré was acting with great success in "La Pie Voleuse," when Paer, happening to see the piece, was struck with its capabilities for musical setting, bought the book, made notes in the margin with a view to its conversion into an opera, and forwarded it to his librettist. The librettist thought, with Paer, that the subject was excellent for music; but he preferred to treat it for Rossini, who seems to have profited by the treachery of Paer's poet in ordinary.

The story of the Maid and the Magpie does not in the present day seem to have been worth quar-

relling about; nor, for that matter, did it lead to any positive dispute. Only Rossini constructed a fine musical work on a dramatic scaffolding furnished by Paer, who had no more wish to help him to a plot than one rival generally has to assist another, especially when the aid is to come from the less successful of the two.

The same Paer, composer of "Agnese" and several works which were very popular during his lifetime, was more unfortunate still with a libretto which he did make into an opera, and which Beethoven nevertheless adopted for his "Fidelio."

"I have seen your piece," said Beethoven to Paer, with cruel thoughtlessness, "and think of setting it to music!" Thus, Paer's "Leonora, ossia l'amore conjugale" came to be overshadowed by the superior presence of Beethoven's great work.

"La Gazza Ladra" belongs neither to opera seria nor to opera buffa; nor can it be classed with those operas of mezzo carattere, "Il Barbiere," and "La Cenerentola." It is a domestic drama set to music —very inferior, as to the subject, to its successors in

the same style, "La Sonnambula," and "Linda di Chamouni."

The heroine of each of these dramas is the victim of a slight mistake. Whether 'tis nobler to be suspected of carrying on an intrigue with a village count or of stealing a silver spoon, may be left to the decision of those prima donnas who have represented both *Ninetta* and *Amina;* but the story of "La Sonnambula" is certainly both more probable, and more pleasing, than that of "La Gazza Ladra," which Rossini does not seem to have been able to treat seriously. The plot is so badly woven in "La Gazza Ladra" that it scarcely hangs together at all. We feel almost from the beginning that everything can be explained at any moment if *Ninetta* will only give herself the trouble to speak.

Fernando cannot say a word in defence of his daughter, though it is to save her that he has given himself up to the authorities. If *Ninetta* will make no statement, it is for fear of compromising her father—who, however, by his own act is already as much compromised as he well can be.

In "La Sonnambula," on the other hand, appear-

ances are entirely against the unfortunate *Amina*, who, to the last moment, is entirely unable to explain her conduct.

In "La Gazza Ladra" Rossini makes some amends to the contralto voice for dethroning it from the highest position, formerly assigned to it in serious opera. Before Rossini's time, when a soprano and a contralto part were introduced together, the former was for the primo uomo (sopranist), the latter for the prima donna. We have seen that Rossini after writing one part for a sopranist (Velluti in "Aureliano"), never wrote a second. Taking his prima donnas as he found them, he continued to compose the principal female part for the contralto, and dispensed with the soprano, except where, as in "L'Italiana," he found it convenient to introduce a soprano voice merely for the sake of the concerted pieces.

In writing "La Gazza Ladra" for the company of La Scala at Milan, he found two female vocalists to whom he could with advantage give leading parts: one a soprano, or mezzo-soprano, as she would now be called, Madame Theresa Belloc; and the other a contralto, Mademoiselle Galianis.

The former was the prima donna; for the latter Rossini composed the charming part of *Pippo*—the first secondary auxiliary part for the contralto which occurs in opera.

Pippo, then, was the first of that interesting tribe of rich-voiced hermaphrodites for whom so many charming melodies were to be written. The humble *Pippo* was the precursor of the picturesque *Malcolm Graeme*, of the chivalrous *Arsace*, of the impulsive *Maffeo Orsini*, of the courteous *Urbano*; as Mademoiselle Galianis was the forerunner of Pisaroni, of Brambilla, and of Alboni. In the present day, for sound commercial reasons, no singer will remain a contralto who can possibly become a soprano; and, whether it be an effect or a cause, since "Linda di Chamouni" (1842), the class of parts represented by the above-named types has received no addition.

Contraltos for the representation of interesting adolescents were so rare when "La Gazza Ladra" was first produced, that in most companies the part of *Pippo* was assigned to a baritone or bass.

In bringing out "La Gazza Ladra" at Milan, Rossini was somewhat in the same position as when, four years previously, he had produced "Tancredi"

at Venice. The Milanese had not considered "Il Turco in Italia," which Rossini wrote for La Scala in 1814, quite good enough for them. This had not prevented Rossini (who must have been a better judge of his own music than the Milanese public) from prefixing the overture written for "Il Turco in Italia" to "Otello," nor from transferring several pieces from the body of that work to "La Cenerentola." Still the Milanese, jealous of the public of Rome, for whom "Il Barbiere" and "La Cenerentola" had been composed, and of that of Naples, where "Otello" had recently been produced, fancied themselves slighted, and seem to have gone to the first representation of "La Gazza Ladra" with the determination to stand no trifling from the composer.

Rossini attacked them at once at the very beginning of the overture with a roll of the drum—or rather of two drums, one at each end of the orchestra—which they could not say had been heard before either at Rome, at Venice, or at Naples. The audience could not but be attentive, and continuing to listen, could not but be delighted.

The freshness and beauty of the melodies, the brilliancy and sonority of the instrumentation, the happy verve which animates the whole work, produced their natural effect.

It cannot be said, however, that Rossini's overture was applauded without a single dissentient voice. One young man in the pit—a student of music, and a pupil of Rolla, the leader of the orchestra—went almost into convulsions on hearing the drums, and wished to take summary vengeance on the composer who had ventured to introduce such instruments into an operatic orchestra. The youthful conservative, with all the ardour of an Italian revolutionist, swore that he would have Rossini's blood, and went about with a stiletto in the hope of meeting him.

The master of this vehement orchestral purist warned Rossini that he meant mischief; but Rossini was so much amused at the idea of any one wishing to assassinate him because in an overture of a military character he had introduced a couple of drums, that he got Rolla to bring him and the young man together. Then in a humble tone he set forth his reasons for introducing the instruments which had so irritated the student's

susceptible ears, and ended by promising never to offend in a similar manner again. For which, or better reasons, Rossini never afterwards began an overture with a duet for drums.

The overture of "La Gazza Ladra" is still the most popular in Italy of all Rossini's overtures, and it formed an essential part of the programme at all the commemorative performances given throughout Italy after the composer's death. When it was executed for the first time it caused raptures of enthusiasm. The audience rose, applauded, called out to the composer, after the queer Italian fashion, and continued to applaud for several minutes.

They had now quite forgotten their predetermination to be severe; they were only too grateful to Rossini for the pleasure he had afforded them. The reconciliation was perfect. The public was prepared to be enchanted with everything; the introduction was very much admired, and *Ninetta's* cavatina, the celebrated

"Di piacer mi balza il cor"

obtained as much applause as the overture itself.

Madame Belloc had sung her air a second time, and it was being called for again, when Rossini, from

his place in the orchestra, appealed to the audience to allow the performance to proceed, saying that the part of *Ninetta* was very heavy, and that Madame Belloc, if called upon to repeat her solos, might be unable to get through it. This protest against the encore system found rational listeners, and the opera went on without further interruption.

Rossini had particularly counted on the success of the prayer for three voices—

"Oh, nume benefico!"

and he was not deceived in his expectation. The success of a prayer for three voices in Winter's recently produced opera of "Maometto" is said to have determined Rossini to introduce a concerted *preghiera* of his own in "La Gazza Ladra." It was a novelty in those days to see operatic characters address a formal invocation to Heaven. Now it is the first thing that occurs to them when they are in trouble.

A dozen operas might be mentioned in which one or more of the personages, and generally a whole crowd, fall down on their knees before the audience and begin to pray. In "La Gazza Ladra" there

are two prayers; the one just mentioned, in the *terzetto*, and *Ninetta's* prayer in the scene of her condemnation. Rossini, when he *did* take an idea from another composer, appropriated it so thoroughly that it belonged to him for ever afterwards. He practised in music the precept enjoined by Voltaire in literature,—not to rob without killing. Mosca's *crescendo* ceased to belong to Mosca when it had once been adopted by Rossini; and Winter, after the trio of "La Gazza Ladra," and above all, the *preghiera* in "Mosè," could no longer pass, even in Italy, as the inventor of stage praying.

But were it not that the prayer in Winter's "Maometto," produced at Milan just before "La Gazza Ladra," is known to have made a distinct impression on Rossini, and to have induced him to order a prayer forthwith from his own librettist, there would be no reason at all why the prayer in "La Gazza Ladra" should be attributed to Winter, considering that a much better model of the same operatic form already existed in the "trio of masks" in "Don Giovanni."

Once more let it be remarked that almost everything new in Rossini was already old in Mozart.

But apart from his own endless verve, gaiety, and melodic inventiveness, what really does belong to Rossini in the matter of operatic forms is the *preghiera* for a whole body of voices, as first introduced in "Mosè."

CHAPTER X.

ARMIDA, ADELAIDA, AND ADINA.

After the immense success of "La Gazza Ladra," Rossini returned to Naples. It will be remembered that while he was at Rome superintending the production of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" the San Carlo had been burnt down. King Ferdinand was in despair at the loss of his magnificent theatre; but that enterprising manager, Barbaja, hearing of his monarch's grief, went to him, and promised to rebuild the San Carlo, more magnificent than ever, in nine months. Barbaja fulfilled his promise, and in January, 1817, the new San Carlo was reopened.

The same year, a few months after the production of "La Gazza Ladra," Rossini brought out at the San Carlo an opera called "Armida," in which the principal characters were assigned to Mdlle. Colbran, Nozzari, and Benedetti. Although very successful at the time, this opera seems soon to have been for-

gotten—doubtless by reason of the subject not being sufficiently modern for our modern taste. "Armida" is noticeable as the only one of Rossini's Italian operas containing ballet music, a style in which, as in every other, he was a consummate master. Of this he gave brilliant proof a dozen years afterwards in the unrivalled ballet music of "Guillaume Tell."

The music written for the divertissement of "Armida" was transferred in 1827 to the French edition of "Mosè" as reconstructed for the stage of the Académie. "Armida" contains the celebrated duet "Amor possente nume" (which Davide thought fit to introduce into the last act of "Otello"; at a period, however, when the composer was no longer in Italy to control him), and a beautiful chorus for female voices, "Che tutto e calma."

In regard to choruses, as to solo voices, Rossini had to suit his music to his company. At Naples he had a fine chorus of women as well as of men. At Rome only men sang in the chorus. Thus the choruses in "Il Barbiere" are written exclusively for male voices.

It is also worth observing that "Armida," like "Otello" and "Mosè in Egitto," is in three acts, a

division which in a few years (witness the operas of Donizetti and Bellini) was quite to supersede the old division into two acts, with the interval between filled up by a ballet an hour long.

In the winter of the same year (1817) Rossini revisited Rome, where he was once more engaged to write an opera for the carnival. "Adelaida di Borgogna" was the title of the work, which is said to have been well received, but does not seem to have left many traces.

Some time in 1818 a Portuguese nobleman requested Rossini to write an opera for the San Carlo theatre of Lisbon, which was delivered and produced the same year under the title of "Adina Ossia il Califfo di Bagdad." "Adina" was a little work in one act, the music of which does not seem to have become known out of Portugal.

CHAPTER XI.

"MOSÈ IN EGITTO:" REFORMS IN OPERA SERIA.

"Mosè in Egitto" marks Rossini's third onward step and third great success in opera seria: "Tancredi," "Otello," "Mosè."

We meet again with Benedetti, Nozzari, and Mdlle. Colbran in the cast of this work, which was produced at the San Carlo Theatre in the Lent of 1818.

Barbaja had further engaged the celebrated Porto, to whom, to Benedetti, and to basses and baritones in general, Rossini rendered an important service by composing the parts of *Faraone* and *Mosè* for the bass voice. Porto's magnificent tones were so effective that he rendered Faraone as prominent a personage as Mosè himself. But Benedetti, who had "made up" after Michael Angelo's celebrated statue, shared Porto's success.

Nozzari, as tenor, represented a lover; Mdlle.

Colbran, as prima donna, his beloved, who, according to the excellent dramatic custom, when nations or parties are in conflict, belonged to opposite sides.

The final emancipation of the serious basso (the comic basso was already eligible for leading parts) dates from the production of "Mosè," in 1818. The liberation was gradual; for, both in "Tancredi" and in "Otello," exceptional prominence had been given to what was formerly called and considered the ultima parte. In "La Gazza Ladra," too, which, however, was not an opera seria, but an opera of mezzo carattere, Galli, who was afterwards to appear as *Maometto* and *Assur*, had played the bass or baritone part of *Fernando*.

It may be said that Rossini, having two basses at hand, composed the parts of *Mosè* and *Faraone* for them; as, in 1816, having two first tenors to write for, he assigned to them the characters of *Otello* and *Iago*. But it is more reasonable to infer that he had now determined to grant the bass his natural dramatic rights, as the representative of imposing and gloomy, as well as of jovial parts.

By this innovation, moreover, Rossini gave variety to his casts, and increased his resources for concerted

music. Probably he would have introduced it before could he have found the singers he wanted among the companies he had engaged to write for. But it was not the custom at the time of Rossini's youth for composers to give important parts to bass singers; and it was only the demand for leading basses created by Rossini which afterwards caused the supply. Moving constantly about from one theatre, one city, to another, and producing three operas a year, he was obliged to write his music according to his singers' voices.

Meyerbeer, when he had begun to compose for the French opera, would wait patiently, month after month, and year after year, until he could find just the voice he wanted; but he did not, like Rossini, compose thirty-four operas before he was thirty-two years of age.

The choral portion of "Mosè" is all important. The chorus of the plague of darkness, in the first act, was found one of the most impressive pieces when the work was first produced; and this was quite surpassed at subsequent representations by the admirable *preghiera* of the passage of the Red Sea,

where the same melody, with just one significant shade of difference, is heard; first in the minor, as a plaintive supplication, afterwards in the major, as a joyous thanksgiving. Nothing is more simple, nothing can be more perfect. The music thoroughly beautiful, the effect thoroughly dramatic.

"Among other things that can be said in praise of your hero, do not forget that he is an assassin," remarked Dr. Cottougna of Naples to the Abbé Carpani, at the time of the general enthusiasm caused by "Mosè." "I can cite to you," he continued, "more than forty attacks of nervous fever, or violent convulsions on the part of young women fond to excess of music, which have no other origin than the prayer of the Hebrews in the third act, with its superb change of key."

In England "Mosè" is scarcely known. The work being unpresentable on our stage in its original form, was brought out, a few years after its production as an oratorio, and afterwards, with a complete transformation in the libretto, as an opera under the title of "Pietra Eremita." The operatic version was given at the King's Theatre with so much success that it attracted large audi-

ences during an entire season. No nervous fevers, no convulsions, were placed to its account; but the subscribers were in ecstacies, and one of the most distinguished supporters of the theatre assured Mr. Ebers, the manager, that he deserved well of his country, and offered as a proof of gratitude to propose him at White's.

It has been recorded that when "Moïse," the French version of "Mosè in Egitto," as remodelled by Rossini, was brought out at the French Opera, forty-five thousand francs were sunk in the Red Sea, and to no effect. In London the Red Sea became merely a river, which, however, failed quite as signally as the larger body of water, and had to be drained off before the second performance took place.

An Italian version of the French version of the original Italian version of "Mosè" was produced at the Royal Italian Opera some twenty years ago under the title of "Zora." It had no permanent success, and was not even played a second season. The piece was found too long, too heavy—it was living music united to a dramatic corpse.

The beautiful prayer, however, survives, and will

doubtless long continue to survive the rest of the work. Played on a single instrument, as by Sivori on the violin, at the service performed in memory of Rossini at Florence, or sung by thousands of vocalists to the accompaniment of some hundreds of musicians, as at various musical gatherings in London and Paris, the melody is always touching, the mass of harmony always impressive.

It is remarkable that this hymn with two aspects, first mournful, then jubilant, was an after thought, and was, moreover, improvised like more than one of Rossini's finest pieces. Indeed, what melody, unless it be a reminiscence, is *not* an improvisation? The idea comes or it does not come.

The story of the theatrical Red Sea and the comic effect produced by its waves, and of the sublime effect produced by the chorus sung on its banks, has often been told, but in a "Life of Rossini" it must of necessity be repeated.

The production of the drama presented many scenic difficulties, from the plague of darkness with which the piece commences, to the passage of the Red Sea, which concludes it.

The representation of darkness was easily

managed by lowering the stage lights, but the passage of the Red Sea was a far more formidable affair; and instead of producing the effect anticipated it was received every night with laughter. The two first acts were always applauded, but the Red Sea, instead of aiding, completely marred the dénouement of the third.

The work, in spite of the Red Sea, lived through one season. When it was about to be revived, the season, or two seasons afterwards, the librettist, Tottola, rushed into Rossini's room, found him holding his usual levee in bed surrounded by friends, and rushing towards him with a sheet of manuscript in his hand, he exclaimed that he had saved the third act.

Rossini thought the third act, or rather its dénouement, past redemption. Tottola suggested that a prayer for the Israelites before and after the miraculous passage might prove very effective, and Rossini saw at once what could be made of the notion.

"There are the verses," exclaimed the librettist; "I wrote them in an hour."

"I will get up and write the music," replied

Rossini. "You shall have it in a quarter of an hour."

He in fact jumped out of bed, began to write in his shirt, and had finished the piece in eight or ten minutes.

A story like this is worth verifying, or at least tracing to its source. Stendhal first told it in France; Stendhal translated it from the Abbé Carpani; and Carpani attributes it to a friend who was present in Rossini's room when the incident took place.

"The day afterwards," says Stendhal, "the audience were delighted as usual with the first act, and all went well until the third, when the passage of the Red Sea being at hand the audience as usual prepared to be amused. The laughter was just beginning in the pit, when it was observed that *Moses* was about to sing. He commenced his solo.

"Dal tuo stellato."

It was the first verse of a prayer which all the people repeat in chorus after *Moses*. Surprised at this novelty, the pit listened, and the laughter

entirely ceased. The chorus, exceedingly fine, was in the minor. *Aaron* continues, followed by the people. Finally *Elcia* addresses to Heaven the same supplication, and the people respond. Then all fall on their knees and repeat the prayer with enthusiasm: the miracle is performed, the sea has opened to leave a path to the people protected by the Lord. This last part is in the major. It is impossible to imagine the thunders of applause that resounded throughout the house; one would have thought it was coming down. The spectators in the boxes standing up and leaning over to applaud, called out at the top of their voice "Bello, bello! O che bello!" I never saw so much enthusiasm, nor such a complete success, which was so much the greater inasmuch as people were quite prepared to laugh. . . . . After that deny that music has a direct physical effect upon the nerves! I am almost in tears when I think of this prayer."

After the miracle in "Mosè," it is not astonishing that Rossini should have become a firm believer in the efficacy of operatic prayer. He now introduced it at every opportunity; and it is noticeable that

in each of the four operas which Rossini produced at the Academy a choral *preghiera* occurs. Auber turned this new dramatic means to admirable account in "La Muette de Portici," and Meyerbeer, after making liberal use of it in other works, seems to have employed it in "L'Africaine" almost to excess. Here we find prayers all through the opera; from the members of the Inquisition in one act; from the sailors on board the celebrated ship in another; from the priests of Madagascar in a third.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE UNFAMILIAR WORKS.

When Rossini was thirty-seven years of age he had written thirty-seven operas, without counting those enlarged editions of former works, "Moïse" and "Le Siège de Corinthe." Of this number a good many are forgotten, many too were never known out of Italy at all. The best; and not merely the best, but the most typical, have remained. Admirable works, which might have made the reputation of another composer, have been overshadowed by masterpieces from the same hand. Repetitions too have perished by the side of originals, and the time will no doubt come when people will judge of Rossini almost entirely by the "Barber of Seville" —the best proportioned, the most characteristic, and certainly the most fortunate in regard to a libretto, of all his works.

Everything that relates to Rossini's earliest works

is interesting; indeed at one time "L'Inganno Felice" was his very best opera—which it is evident that "Ricciardo e Zoraide," the thirtieth on the list, never could have been. This last production, written in the year 1818 for the San Carlo, must have been admirably executed, the chief parts being entrusted to Mademoiselle Colbran, Benedetti the basso, and the two tenors, Nozzare and Davide; but it had the misfortune to be produced immediately after "Mosè," and was crushed by the greater work.

Of "Ermione" little seems now to be known, except that the libretto was based on Racine's "Andromaque," that in addition to Mademoiselle Colbran and the two tenors, Davide and Nozzare, the celebrated contralto Pisarone (for whom Rossini, a few months afterwards, wrote the part of *Malcolm Graeme*) was included in the cast, and that the work, though presented on the stage with all possible advantages, made no lasting impression. It is not even certain that it made a very favourable impression in the first instance; and if "Ricciardo e Zoraide" lost by coming just after "Mosè," "Ermione" can scarcely have gained by coming just before "La Donna del Lago."

Stendhal—an untrustworthy guide, the more so as he makes no distinction between his own personal opinions and those of Carpani, from whom he so constantly borrows—informs us that the music of "Ermione" is composed in the declamatory style of Gluck. M. Azevedo says that it is written in the simple, vigorous style adopted by Rossini for treating the subject of "Guillaume Tell." The two statements may be reconciled, if indeed (which is quite probable) one has not been suggested by the other. It may be said generally, that in "Ermione" the composer studied the dramatic requirements of his subject more than the vocal capabilities of his singers. The experiment does not seem to have been successful as far as the public taste was concerned.

But between "Ermione" and "La Donna del Lago," both produced at the San Carlo at Naples, Rossini brought out "Eduardo e Cristina" at Venice.

According to the author of Le Rossiniane, "Eduardo e Cristina" was little more than Rossini's two previous operas, "Ricciardo e Zoraide" and "Ermione," in another shape. The manager of

the San Benedetto Theatre at Venice had engaged Rossini to furnish him with a work for the Spring season. But urgent private affairs detained the composer at Naples, which he could not prevail upon himself to quit until about ten days before the day fixed for the production of his new and original work.

It is true that Rossini had in the meanwhile forwarded a good many pieces of music to the expectant manager. The words were not always the same as those which the manager had forwarded to him, but no one, not even the manager, pays much attention to the words of an opera, and the Venetian impresario was only too glad to get the music.

Nine days before the day of performance Rossini arrived in Venice to give the finishing touches to his work, see it through the rehearsals, and direct the first representation.

The opera was immensely applauded; but after the first two or three pieces the audience all remarked a Neapolitan merchant in the pit who seemed to know the work by heart, and anticipated the vocalists in singing the principal melodies.

His neighbours asked him how he came to have heard the new music.

"New music?" replied the merchant; "it is a mixture of 'Ricciardo e Zoraide' and 'Ermione,' produced at Naples six months ago. The only thing new is the title. Rossini has taken the most beautiful phrase from the duet in 'Ricciardo,' and turned it into a cavatina for your new opera. Even the words are the same. 'Ah nati in ver noi siamo.'"

During the entre-acte, and while the ballet was going on, the story of the Neapolitan merchant, after being told in the theatrical café, soon spread in the theatre itself. The local *dilettanti*, who had been vying with one another in sounding the praises of the work, were disgusted to find that it had not been written for them at all, but had been composed for Naples.

However, the public liked the music, and yielding only to their own impressions, applauded it. The impresario on the other hand was bound to be seriously annoyed, and said that Rossini had shamefully deceived him, had ruined him, and so on.

Rossini answered that he had promised the manager music which would be applauded; that his music had been and would continue to be applauded, and that applause, above all from the managerial point of view, was the one thing to be considered.

The manager's reply to this sophism has not been preserved.

CHAPTER XIII.

SACRED AND SECULAR SUBJECTS.

It was the fate of Rossini to have to write a certain number of complimentary cantatas, two of which were composed and executed in the year 1819; one in honour of the King of Naples, the other to congratulate his visitor the Emperor of Austria.

Rossini did not admit the principle of nationality in music, which he divided generally into good music and bad. He also seems to have held that music had no politics, and he composed with the greatest impartiality works for the liberal, and for the monarchical and conservative side. He is known to have written a patriotic hymn at Bologna in 1815. Cimarosa had been thrown into prison (where, according to some writers, he was poisoned) for a similar performance; but Cimarosa doubtless went to work with

greater earnestness than Rossini, and doubtless did not limit the expression of his political opinions to music alone.

In 1820 Rossini produced a patriotic cantata at Naples during the temporary success of the Liberals; and in 1823 composed "Il Vero Omaggio," a cantata performed at Verona during the Congress at which liberal ideas played no great part.

In 1847 he addressed his "Stanzas" to Pius IX., and he had previously made his peace with the Church by composing a mass, which was performed at Naples in 1819—the year of the two cantatas. It is noticeable that the various pieces contained in this religious work (apparently the one which figures in several catalogues with the date of 1832 erroneously attached to it) were all founded on motives from Rossini's operas.

This was the mass which, according to some enthusiastic Neapolitan priest, could not fail, in spite of all his sins, to open to Rossini the gates of Paradise. "Knock with that," he said, "and St. Peter cannot refuse you."

Handel, in a similar manner, transferred several of his operatic airs to oratorios. Music serves

admirably to heighten the effect of a dramatic situation, or to give force and intensity to the expression of words; but the same music may often be allied with equal advantage to words of very different shades of meaning. Thus the same music may be made to depict sentiments, feelings, even passions (grief, remorse, ardent longing), which belong equally to a religious and to a secular order of ideas. Gluck knew as well as Piccini and all the Italian composers, that an overture written specially for one opera might, without disadvantage, be prefixed to another. Gluck's overture to "Armide" was originally the overture to "Telemacco," and he borrowed both from the said "Telemacco" and from his "Clemenza di Tito," to enrich the score of "Iphigénie en Aulide."

Paisiello, when he was Napoleon's chapel master, used to compose a mass every two months or oftener —he produced fourteen in two years. He received a thousand francs apiece for them, and it is said that after making use of numerous pieces of church music which he had written for Italy, he went for his motives to his serious and even his comic operas. One can recall many love songs of an

elevated character, those of Mozart and of Schubert for instance, songs of a mournful and regretful character, songs of a sentimental and slightly passionate cast, which only require to be united to religious words to acquire religious character.

It is of course essential for the success of music thus transferred from secular to religious compositions, that it shall be heard for the first time as part of the latter.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LA DONNA DEL LAGO."

In proportion as Rossini elevated and enlarged his style, in proportion as he aimed at rendering his works truly dramatic, so did his success diminish. The grand combinations in "La Donna del Lago" were not appreciated at Naples; "Semiramide" was coldly received at Venice; "Guillaume Tell" did not please the public when it was first produced at Paris.

If Rossini could have produced anything finer than "Guillaume Tell," who knows but that it would have been hissed?

"La Donna del Lago" and "Guillaume Tell" possess many points in common, the Italian work being in some sort the forerunner of the greater work composed for the French stage. Both dramas are conceived on a large scale, and deal with large masses; both are full of new picturesque effects,

and one may almost say "local colour," though Rossini did not commit the puerility of introducing national tunes to remind his audiences that the scene of "La Donna del Lago" was in Scotland, that of "Guillaume Tell" in Switzerland.

Among the very numerous reforms introduced by Rossini into opera seria—reforms which now pass without notice because no works by Italian composers anterior to Rossini are ever played*—the choice of subject has not yet been mentioned.

As French dramatists and painters, until the beginning of what is called the romantic movement, dealt only with classical subjects, so Italian composers were confined, either by general prejudice or by a mere habit of routine, to the legendary and mythological subjects of antiquity. Rossini had, it is true, come down to the Crusades in "Tancredi," but the libretto of that work all the same was based on one of the most conventional specimens of the French classical drama. Without

* There are opera-goers still living who have heard Cimarosa's "Matrimonio Segretto," but no opera seria by an Italian composer anterior to Rossini has been heard even by the oldest habitué.

being a professed theorist, Rossini studied the resources of his art much more profoundly than is supposed by those who judge him by the habitual tone of his conversation, and by the haste and apparent carelessness which he often exhibited in composing even his best works; and Rossini, consciously or unconsciously, but as it seems to me deliberately, and not merely from instinct, broke through the rigid old rule which limited the composer to one range of subjects, and those of the most familiar and interesting kind.

For they were very familiar, though entirely removed from the possible sympathies of a modern audience. What, indeed, were Artemisia and Artaxerxes to them, or they to Artemisia and Artaxerxes? Verdi, going perhaps to the other extreme, sets the latest French novel to music. The composers of the eighteenth century went to work over and over again on the same well-worn libretti by Apostolo Zeno, Calsabigi and Metastasio.

Hasse composed two operas on the libretto of "Artemisia," two on "Artaserse," and three on "Arminio." Jomelli set "Didone" twice, and "Demofonte" twice; Piccini and Sacchini each

composed music twice to the "Olimpiade." Mozart, after "Don Giovanni," had gone back to Metastasio, in "La Clemenza di Tito;" and Rossini began by writing in the true old style "A Lament on the Death of Orpheus"—an event which must have deeply affected him.

There was a time when Metastasio was himself an innovator. Before being classical, opera was altogether mythological. "At the birth of the opera," says Rousseau, in the "Musical Dictionary," "its inventors, to elude that which seemed unnatural as an imitation of humour in the union of music with speech, transferred their scenes from earth into heaven and hell. Not knowing how to make men speak, they made gods and devils, instead of heroes and shepherds, sing. Thus magic and marvels became speedily the stock-in-trade of the lyrical theatre; yet, in spite of every effort to fascinate the eyes whilst multitudes of instruments and voices bewildered the air, the action of every piece remained cold, and all its scenes were totally devoid of interest. As there was no plot which, however intricate, could not easily be unravelled by the intervention of some god, the spectator

quietly abandoned to the poet the task of delivering his hero from his greatest dangers.

Gradually gods were driven from the stage on which men were represented. "Gods and devils," says Arteaga ("Revoluzioni del Teatro Italiano"), "were banished from the stage as soon as poets discovered the art of making men speak with dignity. This reform was followed by another which Rousseau describes as the work of Apostolo Zeno and Metastasio, his pupil. I will quote one more passage from the "Musical Dictionary" to show what the operatic ideal was in 1730, and how much it differed from that of 1830, as entertained by Rossini, Auber, and Meyerbeer :—

"The opera, it was felt, should represent nothing cold or intellectual," says Rousseau—"nothing that the spectator could witness with sufficient tranquillity to reflect on what he saw. And it is in this especially that the essential difference between the lyric drama and pure tragedy consists. All political deliberations, all plots, conspiracies, explanations, recitals, sententious maxims—in a word, all which speaks to the reason, was banished from the theatre of the heart, together with all *jeux d'esprit*,

madrigals, and other pleasant conceits which suppose some activity of thought. On the contrary, to depict all the energies of sentiment, all the violence of the passions, was made the principal object of this drama; for the illusion which makes its charm is destroyed as soon as the author and actor leave the spectator a moment to himself. It is on this principle that the modern* opera is established. Apostolo Zeno, the Corneille of Italy, and his tender pupil, who is its Racine [Metastasio], have opened and carried to its perfection this new career of the dramatic art. They have brought the heroes of history on a theatre which seemed only adapted to exhibit the phantoms of fable."

Rossini did for the heroes of history what his predecessors had done for the phantoms of fable; he substituted for them the personages of modern romance. The composer had already placed himself above the librettist, whose by no means unimportant duty it is to prepare (in the admirable words of Victor Hugo,† "un canevas d'opéra plus ou moins

* Rousseau wrote the "Dictionnaire Musicale" in 1754.

† Preface to Victor Hugo's libretto of "Esmeralda" (set to music by Mademoiselle Bertin).

bien disposé pour que l'œuvre musicale s'y superpose heureusement;" and again, "une trame qui ne demande pas mieux que de se dérober sous cette riche et éblouissante broderie qui s'appelle la musique."

"La Donna del Lago," the fourth of those "serious" operas by Rossini, each of which made a distinct impression, marks another step forward in the composer's progress from "Tancredi" to "Guillaume Tell." The varied cast includes parts for a soprano (Mdlle. Colbran), a contralto (Mdlle. Pisaroni), two tenors (Davide and Nozzare), and a bass (Benedetti). Great prominence is given to the chorus; and for the first time Rossini introduces a military band on the stage, which is heard first by itself, afterwards in conjunction with the chorus.

This innovation, of which, however (once more!), an example was already to be found in "Don Giovanni," does not seem to have been admired when "La Donna del Lago" was first performed; and hence it may be inferred that if Rossini had brought out, say half a dozen years before, an opera, presenting at once all the reforms which, as

it was, he introduced gradually, then such an opera would have been too much in advance of the public taste to have had any chance of success.

A bass singer in the foreground, a chorus taking an active part in the drama, recitatives accompanied by the orchestra, the orchestra itself strengthened by additional brass instruments, a military band on the stage—this certainly would have been too much for the Italian audiences of 1813. As it was, when the military band on the stage, a chorus of Highland bards, with harp accompaniments, and the instruments of the ordinary theatrical orchestra, were all heard together, the audience of the San Carlo Theatre in the year 1819 were not at all agreeably impressed by the novel combination. It is always somewhat dangerous to try new effects on the stage, and the magnificent finale of "La Donna del Lago," the finest musical scene the composer had produced, imperilled the success of the whole work.

Rossini was much distressed by the reception his opera encountered, and instead of going quietly to bed, as after the first tempestuous representation of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," started the same night for

Milan. He does not seem, however, to have lost his spirits. At least, he regained them, and by way of a jocular revenge on the Neapolitan public spread the report, wherever he stopped, that they were delighted with his new opera, and that its success had been unbounded.

Rossini persisted in this humorous misrepresentation, but he had scarcely arrived at Milan when what he fancied was still false had become the simple truth. On "La Donna del Lago" being performed a second time, it struck the Neapolitans that they had behaved unfairly in not listening to the work the night before—when, startled by the trumpets of the military band, they seemed to have lost the faculty of reasonable attention. After applauding Mdlle. Colbran and Davide's duet, the chorus of women, Mdlle. Pisaroni's air, and even the finale to the first act, in which a concession had been made to popular prejudice by a reduction in the number of trumpets, they had virtually reversed their verdict on the opera. In the second act, the trio, and Mdlle. Pisaroni's second air, called forth fresh expressions of approbation. Mdlle. Pisaroni, in particular, was honoured with what in

the present day would be called an "ovation." Her success, however, amounted to more than an "ovation;" it was a genuine triumph.

"La Donna del Lago" is one of Rossini's most notable works; but operas, more even than books, have "their fates;" and the fate of an opera depends not only on the music, but also on the "book" to which that music is attached.

If an opera could live by the music alone, "La Donna del Lago" would not have fallen so entirely out of the recollection of managers, as it seems to have done. But it must be remembered that there is one particular point which tells both for and against this work. It contains one of the finest parts ever written for the contralto voice. An Alboni in the character of *Malcolm Graeme* insures in a great degree its success. In the absence of a contralto of the highest merit, it is scarcely worth while to produce it at all.

In the year 1846 a French edition of "La Donna del Lago," enlarged, but not improved, called "Robert Bruce," was produced at the Académie of Paris. The new libretto was by Messrs. Waez and

Royer, the librettists of "La Favorita," to which M. Niedermeyer, the composer of "Marie Stuart," adapted pieces by Rossini, taken not only from "La Donna del Lago," but also from "Armida" and "Zelmira," an opera of the year 1822. M. Niedermeyer went to Bologna to consult Rossini on the subject of this pasticcio, but does not seem to have received from him any important advice.

Rossini probably entertained the same views in regard to "Robert Bruce," which he expressed in writing with reference to "Un Curioso Accidente."* He would not acknowledge the work as belonging to him, but did not object to its being presented to the public, provided the arrangement were attributed to the proper person. Rossini's credit was saved by M. Niedermeyer's name appearing in the bill. Nevertheless, most of Rossini's friends thought it a pity he should have given any sort of countenance to the production of this very unsatisfactory adaptation. As it was, Rossini contented himself with ridiculing it in a letter which was circulated at the time.

The evening on which "Robert Bruce" was to be

* See page 21.

performed for the first time, Rossini at Bologna went out with Lablache for a drive.

"What a breeze there is to-night," Lablache said, as he closed the window of the carriage.

"The hissing at the first representation of 'Robert Bruce,'" replied Rossini; "it will not do us any harm."

CHAPTER XV.

END OF ROSSINI'S ITALIAN CAREER.

"La Donna del Lago" was Rossini's Italian "Tell" in more than one respect. As the composer was only twenty-seven years of age, and had not even begun to make his fortune when it was produced, he could not very well abandon musical composition merely on finding that his greatest work was not appreciated.

But he certainly felt hurt at the reception given to "La Donna del Lago" on its first production at Naples; and although he kept his secret (if there really was a secret) both in regard to this work and to "Guillaume Tell," the fact is patent that of his next five operas, the last he wrote for Italy, one ("Bianca il Faliero") was composed for Milan, one ("Matilda di Sabran") for Rome, one ("Zelmira") for Vienna, and one ("Semiramide") for Venice.

As to the fifth ("Maometto Secondo"), Rossini

was already under an engagement to furnish it to Barbaja for the Carnival of 1830, when "La Donna del Lago" was brought out in October, 1819. But after the production of "Maometto Secondo" (which we shall meet with again under another title at Paris) he wrote nothing specially for Naples, except a farewell cantata called "La Riconoscenza," which was produced at his benefit, on the 27th of December, 1821.

The next day he quitted the city for which he had written eight operas, with "Otello," "Mosè," and "La Donna del Lago" among the number, went to Bologna, and there married Mademoiselle Isabella Colbran, who, in all Rossini's operas written for Naples, played the first part, and who was yet to appear as *Zelmira* and as *Semiramide*.

"But we are anticipating," as the novelists say. Before getting married, Rossini had other engagements to fulfil. "Bianca e Faliero" was produced at La Scala for the Carnival of 1820, without entire success. Nevertheless, thanks to a duet for female voices, and a quartet, which was so much liked that it was sung twice every evening (once in its proper

place in the opera, once in the ballet), the opera attained a highly satisfactory number of representations.

"Maometto Secondo" was also written for the Carnival of 1820, and, as before mentioned, was the last work that Rossini wrote specially for the San Carlo. Galli made a great impression in the part of *Maometto*, and his air, "Sogete," was particularly applauded. The other singers were Mademoiselle Colbran, Mademoiselle Chaumel (the future wife of Rubini), Nozzare, Cicimarra, and Benedetti.

M. Azevedo tells us that the Duke Ventignano, who wrote the libretto of "Maometto Secondo," passed for a *jettatore*, and that, to avert the influence of the poet's "evil eye," Rossini took care to make the indispensable signs with his thumbs from time to time as he composed his music.

But Rossini's fate seems to have depended more upon political events than on the "evil eye" of individuals. The Revolution of 1830 affected his French career, and the Neapolitan Revolution of 1820 had doubtless quite as much to do with Rossini's

departure from Naples as the cold reception of "La Donna del Lago." The republicans actually wished him to enter the national guard, and it is said that General Pepe did prevail upon him two or three times to wear a uniform.

The change in the political situation had a disastrous effect on the fortunes of Barbaja, who, to begin with, found himself deprived of his customary profits from the operatic gambling tables, which were suppressed.

"Matilda di Sabran" was produced at Rome for the Carnival of 1821, not at the scene of Rossini's former triumph in the same capital, but at the "Apollo," a theatre directed by the banker Torlonia. This opera, revived in Paris some years ago with Madame Bosio, Madame Borghi-Mamo, and Signor Gassier in the principal characters, is scarcely known in England. It is remarkable among Rossini's works as the only one in which the chief female part is written for a high soprano. On the occasion of its first performance the admirers of Rossini and the partisans of the old school disputed, quarrelled, and ultimately fought outside the theatre

with sticks, when it is satisfactory to know that the admirers of Rossini gained the day.

Paganini, happening to be in Rome when "Matilda di Sabran" was produced, offered to direct the orchestra at the three first performances, and did so with great success. Never, it is said, did the band of the "Apollo" play with so much spirit before.

"Zelmira," composed for Vienna, was first produced at Naples. It will be remembered that the Italian theatre at Vienna, the San Carlo and Del Fondo theatre of Naples were all in the hands of the same manager. Mademoiselle Colbran, Mademoiselle Cecconi, Davide, Nozzare, and Benedetti were the singers, and the work was brought out in the middle of December, 1821.

Rossini was now on the point of leaving Naples altogether. A few days after the first representation of "Zelmira" he took a benefit, when a cantata, which he had written for the occasion, "La Riconoscenza," was executed, Rubini and the former Mademoiselle Chaumel, now Madame Rubini, being among the vocalists.

Mademoiselle Colbran did not sing at this interesting ceremony; she had to start early the next morning for Bologna, where a ceremony still more interesting required her presence. Rossini accompanied her, and the marriage took place in the palace of Cardinal Opizzoni, Archbishop of Bologna, who performed the service. Rossini's parents were present, together with Nozzare and Davide, the two inseparable tenors. Mademoiselle Colbran had saved a considerable sum of money, considering the difference between the earnings of an Italian prima donna fifty years ago and those of a European prima donna of the present day.

M. Azevedo assigns to Mademoiselle Colbran an income from property of four hundred a year; Stendhal, more generous, had given her eight hundred. She had at least, in the words of Zanolini, "a delicious villa and revenues in Sicily."

From Bologna, Rossini, his wife, and the two tenors went to Vienna, where the composer was received with enthusiasm, and what was more, no doubt, to his taste, with distinguished attention from the most illustrious persons in the capital. It

is said that Rossini was handled roughly in the musical press, and that the names of Haydn and Mozart were invoked to his disadvantage. This, however, did not diminish his success with the public, who, going to the theatre to be pleased, came away delighted whenever one of Rossini's works had been performed.

Various accounts of Rossini's interview with Beethoven have been published. Beethoven had heard the "Barber of Seville," had been much pleased with it, and had thought still better of it on examining the score. However this may have been, Rossini knew and greatly admired Beethoven's work,* and he made a point of calling upon the great composer soon after his arrival in Vienna. The interview does not seem to have been a long one, nor, considering that Beethoven was in broken health and tormented by his malady of deafness, could it have been interesting on either side. It left a sad impression on Rossini, who appreciated Beethoven's genius.

* Ferdinand Hiller's Conversations. M. Azevedo says it was in conformity with Rossini's advice that Habeneck produced Beethoven's Symphonies.

The attacks with which Rossini was saluted on his first appearance at Vienna, as afterwards at Paris, did him more good than harm. They irritated his admirers, and called forth their enthusiasm. They also drew out some able replies. Carpani, the author of "Le Rossiniane," was at Vienna when Rossini arrived there to produce "Zelmira," and took up the pen valiantly on behalf of his idol.

Carpani was a good musician, and should not be held answerable for all Stendhal's remarks on music in the "Vie de Rossini," any more than he must be credited with the acute, delicate observations on literature, society, national peculiarities, &c., in which the book abounds. Carpani had the happiness to furnish Rossini with the words of an air which he added to "Zelmira" for Mademoiselle Eckerlin, who undertook the contralto part when the opera was brought out at Vienna. He was present at a great number of representations, and ended by writing an elaborate notice of the work.

"'Zelmira,'" he says, "is an opera in only two acts, which lasts nearly four hours, and does not appear long to any one, not even to the musicians of the orchestra, which is to say everything. In

this extraordinary opera there are not two bars which can be said to be taken from any other work of Rossini. Far from working his habitual mine, the author exhibits a vein hitherto unattacked. It contains enough to furnish not one, but four operas. In this work Rossini, by the new riches which he draws from his prodigious imagination, is no longer the author of 'Otello,' 'Tancredi,' 'Zoraide,' and all his preceding works; he is another composer—new, agreeable, and fertile, as much as the first, but with more command of himself, more pure, more masterly, and, above all, more faithful to the interpretation of the words. The forms of style employed in this opera, according to circumstances, are so varied, that now we seem to hear Gluck, now Traetta, now Sacchini, now Mozart, now Handel; for the gravity, the learning, the naturalness, the suavity of their conceptions live and blossom again in 'Zelmira.' The transitions are learned, and inspired more by considerations of poetry and sense than by caprice and a mania for innovation. The vocal parts, always natural, never trivial, give expression to the words, without ceasing to be melodious. The great point is to preserve

both. The instrumentation of Rossini is really incomparable by the vivacity and freedom of the manner, by the variety and justness of the colouring."

On the subject of Madame Rossini-Colbran's voice Carpani writes like a Neapolitan royalist. "She has," he says, "a very sweet, full, sonorous quality of voice, particularly in the middle and lower notes; a finished, pure, insinuating style. She has no outbursts, but a fine *portamento* perfect intonation, and an accomplished method. The Graces seem to have watered with nectar each of her syllables, her *fioriture*, her *volate*, her shakes. She sings with one breath a series of semitones, extending to nearly two octaves, in a clear, pearly manner, and excels in all the other arts of singing. Her acting is noble and dignified, as becomes her imposing and majestic beauty."

As to the two tenors, Nozzare was "more a baritone than a tenor;" endowed with extraordinary power, and a great extent of voice.

Of Davide's singing, Carpani has a much better opinion than was formed by M. Bertin, the French critic, who, however, regarded Davide more from

a dramatic than from a musical point of view. "He is," says the Italian writer, "the Moscheles, the Paganini of singing. Like these two despots of their instrument, he manages as he wishes a voice which is not perfect, but of great extent, and what he obtains from it is astonishing."

At the conclusion of the Vienna season, Rossini returned to Bologna, where, soon after his arrival, he received a letter from Prince Metternich, inviting him to come to Verona during the Congress. The minister pointed out that the object of the gathering being the re-establishment of general harmony, the presence of Rossini was indispensable. The composer accepted the argument, went to Verona, and wrote for the benefit of the Congress—into whose programme festivities entered largely—three cantatas, the most important of which was called "Il Vero Omaggio."

At Verona, Rossini was introduced to Chateaubriand, with whom he had a long and interesting conversation. Prince Metternich surrounded him with attentions, and the composer left Verona highly gratified with his visit. But for a colossal statue placed just above the orchestra, which shook with

each musical vibration, and threatened to fall and crush the conductor, Rossini's happiness at Verona would have been without alloy.

Before going to Vienna, Rossini had engaged to compose an opera for Venice. He seems to have been determined to write no more for Italy, and being much pressed by the director of the Fenice, thought to settle the matter by asking an exorbitant price; but the enterprising manager was not to be checked. The demand of a sum equivalent to about two hundred pounds did not alarm him, and Rossini consented to furnish the opera.

In composing "Semiramide," the work destined for Venice, Rossini took his time.

"It is the only one of my Italian operas," he afterwards said, "that I was able to do a little at my ease; my contract gave me forty days, but," he added, "I was not forty days writing it."

The Austrian and Russian emperors after leaving Verona went to Venice, where they arrived just when Rossini was working at "Semiramide." Two concerts were given in honour of the illustrious visitors at the Imperial palace, under Rossini's direction. While the second concert was going on,

the two emperors, accompanied by Prince Metternich, asked the maestro to sing, when he executed with Galli the duet from "Cenerentola," to which he added *Figaro's* air from the "Barber."

The first representation of "Semiramide" took place at the Fenice Theatre on the 3rd of February, 1823, just ten years after the production of his first great opera seria, "Tancredi," which was played for the first time about the middle of the Carnival of 1813.

Madame Rossini-Colbran sustained the part of *Semiramide*, Madame Mariani that of *Arsace*, Galli was *Assur*, Mariani, *Oroe*, and the English tenor, Sinclair, *Idreno*. Of the two airs written for the tenor, one only has been preserved. The other, like the trio of the music lesson in the "Barber of Seville," is said to have been lost through the fault of the copyist.

If "Semiramide" does not, like "Otello," "Mosè," and "La Donna del Lago," present any novelty of treatment, it reproduces all the features which were new in those three works. There is a leading part for the bass voice; a secondary part, but one of great importance, for the contralto (*Arsace* is

a lineal descendant of *Pippo*, the first of the family); the chorus takes an active part in the drama; the recitative is accompanied by the orchestra; there is a military band on the stage; and there is a scene in which the chorus, the military band, and the theatrical orchestra are heard in combination. These innovations are once more specified to remind the reader of the progress Rossini had made as a dramatic composer since his first Venetian opera of "Tancredi."

"Semiramide," too, is as superior to "Tancredi" in vigour of style, in richness of colouring, as in definable operatic forms.

This, the last of Rossini's Italian operas, cannot have been imperfectly executed; Rossini had plenty of time for superintending the rehearsals, and his singers were all admirable. Nevertheless the opera was not much liked. It was conceived on too grand a scale, and Stendhal, apparently by reason of the importance assigned to the orchestra, came to the conclusion that it was written in the German style.

M. Castil-Blaze fancies Rossini knew beforehand that "Semiramide" would not be appreciated, and

that the piccolo in the accompaniment of *Assur's* air meant hisses for the Venetian public.

M. Azevedo points out that to please the Venetians, Rossini had introduced the melody of the Carnival of Venice in the duet "Ebben ferisce;" but neither instrumental hisses nor vocal compliments were of any avail. The public did not by any means condemn "Semiramide," but they found it rather heavy, and allowed it to fall. These instances of bad taste are constantly occurring in the history of music.

Indeed, as to pure melody, who is to be the judge? Stendhal, the man of taste, considers *Almaviva's* cavatina in the "Barber of Seville" rather common; and M. Fétis, who is a learned musician, does not think much of *Matilde's* air in "Guillaume Tell."

In any case, the Venetians found "Semiramide" uninteresting — "Semiramide," which is full of beauty from beginning to end; and Rossini had now one more motive for deciding to leave Italy and try his fortune—that is to say, make his fortune—in France and England.

PART III.

ROSSINI'S FRENCH CAREER.

CHAPTER I.

A VISIT TO LONDON—ROSSINI AND GEORGE IV.

Rossini until after his marriage never left Italy. But he then made up his mind to travel, and one journey leads naturally to another. The composer's visit to Vienna procured him the invitation to Verona, and at Verona he was brought into contact with the ambassadors of all the principal Powers in Europe.

And it must not be thought that ambassadors did not occupy themselves very practically in those days with operatic matters. Mr. Ebers, in his "Seven Years of the King's Theatre," tells us that on one occasion the English ambassador at Paris exercised his influence to obtain the best artists from that city. The Baron de la Ferté was about the same time sent on a mission to London to reclaim some other artists, who had stayed beyond the period of leave granted to them by the Académie

Royale; and a few years later it was through Prince Polignac, French ambassador at London, that Rossini's engagement to direct the Italian Opera at Paris was effected.

It was at Bologna, immediately after his return from Verona, that Rossini received an invitation from the management of the King's Theatre to pass the next season (from January to May, 1824) in London. A formal engagement was at the same time proposed to him, by which the services of himself as composer, and of his wife as singer, were secured.

"The King's Theatre was then in the hands of Mr. Ebers, who has left an interesting and instructive account of his operatic experience. The outgoing manager, like all his predecessors from the beginning, had failed, and there was an execution in the theatre when Mr. Ebers undertook to reopen it for the season of 1821. The new director, either to give himself confidence or to inspire confidence in the subscribers and general public, prevailed upon five noblemen to form a "Committee of Superintendence;" but their duties do not seem

to have been well defined, and all the responsibilities of management rested with Mr. Ebers.

Rossini must have had a good company to write for at the King's Theatre. The singers engaged by Mr. Ebers, when he commenced his career as manager in 1821, were Madame Camporese, Madame Vestris, Madame Ronzi de Begnis; and MM. Ambrogetti, Angrisani, Begrez, and Curioni. Many if not all these artistes were doubtless re-engaged at the end of the first season, for we are told significantly enough that "it was considered successful though the manager lost money by it;" and in 1824 the company was further strengthened by the accession of Madame Pasta and Madame Catalani.

During his first "successful" season Mr. Ebers lost seven thousand pounds, when, by way of encouraging him, the proprietor, Mr. Chambers, increased his rent from three thousand one hundred and eighty pounds to ten thousand. Altogether from the beginning of 1821 to the end of 1827, Mr. Ebers dropped money regularly every year; the smallest deficit in the budget of any one season being that of the last, when the manager thought

himself fortunate to escape with a loss of not quite three thousand pounds.

In England theatres do not receive "subventions" from the State; but in support of opera, if not of other forms of the drama, enterprising persons have always been found willing to lose from time to time a little fortune. As a consequence of this happy infatuation the Italian Opera in England, like England itself as a musical country, has always had an excellent name with foreign artistes; and Rossini did not err in anticipating for himself and wife a rich harvest from their united efforts during the London season of 1824.

The reputation of Rossini in England was immense with the general public and the great majority of dilettanti, though, as in Vienna and Paris, critics could be found to deny his merit. The objections to his music seem to have proceeded chiefly from persons who had become attached by inveterate habit to works of an older school. Some, too, may have complained of the constant preference given to his operas above those of all other composers, from mere professional jealousy.

Still there was no musician at our Italian Opera to play towards Rossini the part with which, as we shall afterwards see, Paer was credited in Paris; and if our English composers ever injured Rossini it was not by attacking him in print, nor by getting up intrigues against him, but by taking him under their patronage, and presenting him to the public with additions and adornments of their own.

"Tom" Cook, Mr. Rophino Lacy, Sir Henry Bishop, instead of undervaluing distinguished foreign composers in the French style, were in the habit of "adapting" and editing their works, introducing new airs into them, and furnishing them with new overtures—the old ones not being good enough.

However, at the King's Theatre Rossini's operas were produced in their original Italian form; and Lord Mount Edgcumbe tells us that for many years after the first introduction of Rossini's works into England, "so entirely did he engross the stage, that the operas of no other master were ever to be heard, with the exception only of those of Mozart; and of his, only 'Don Giovanni' and 'Le Nozze de Figaro.' Every other composer past and present

was totally put aside, and these two alone named or thought of."

Rossini then was at least admired in good company; but the admiration generally felt for him was not entertained by the author just mentioned. It has already been seen that Lord Mount Edgcumbe, who no doubt represented a number of old amateurs, the dilettanti of a past age, was by no means delighted with Rossini's brilliant style, nor, above all, with his innovations in regard to form.

"The construction of these newly invented pieces," he justly remarks, "is essentially different from the old. The dialogue," he continues—with less justice—"which used to be carried on in recitative, and which in Metastasio's operas is often so beautiful and interesting, is now cut up (and rendered unintelligible if it were worth listening to) into pezzi concertati, or long singing conversations, which present a tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing motivos, having nothing to do with each other. Single songs are almost exploded. Even the prima donna, who would formerly have complained at having less than three or four airs allotted

to her, is now satisfied with one trifling cavatina for a whole evening."

The beauty of Lord Mount Edgcumbe's criticism is that his bare facts, however absurdly he may qualify them, do in themselves possess a certain amount of truth. It is only his feelings and opinions that are erroneous. It is observable, too, that though he does not like the new composer himself, he never attempts to deny Rossini's great success with the public.

Mr. Ebers is equally explicit as to the popularity of Rossini just at the time when he was expected in London. "Of all the operas," he says, "produced from 1821 to 1828, nearly half were Rossini's, or in exact numbers fourteen out of thirty-four;" and it must be remembered that the majority of these were constantly repeated, whereas most of the others were brought out only for a few nights and then laid aside.

The visit, then, of Rossini to London in 1824 was looked forward to by all the musical and fashionable society of London with great interest, and it doubtless had a happy effect on the subscription list at

the King's Theatre. On leaving Bologna Rossini took route to London through Paris, where he arrived with his wife at the beginning of November. He was received with much enthusiasm, though, as we shall afterwards see, some unavailing attempts were made to persuade the public that he was, after all, a very much over-rated man.

After remaining a month in Paris, whither he was to return a few months later, Rossini started for England, and after a very bad passage, arrived in London suffering from the combined effects of exhaustion and a particularly bad cold.

He had only been a few minutes in his apartments when Count Lieven, the Russian ambassador, was announced. The Count had called, on the part of the king, to say that his Majesty wished to see Rossini before any one else. It must be explained that Rossini had met the Countess Lieven at Verona, and it is to be presumed that she had recommended him to her husband.

The composer acknowledged this signal attention in becoming terms. The state of his health did not allow him to profit forthwith by the king's invitation, but he promised to inform his Majesty as soon as

he got better, and in the meanwhile to receive no visitors. He accordingly remained in the house, and denied himself to every one.

Three days afterwards, feeling better, and his cold having disappeared, Rossini started with Count Lieven for Brighton, and was presented to George IV. at the Pavilion.

His Majesty was playing at cards with a lady. He received Rossini very cordially, and invited him to take a hand at écarté, but the composer modestly declined, saying that he would rather not have so powerful an opponent. After a few minutes' conversation, which seems to have left a very agreeable impression upon Rossini, the king asked him if he would like to hear his band, and taking him by the arm, conducted him to the concert-room.

When they reached the concert-room, the king said to Rossini that he would now hear a piece of music which would perhaps not be to his liking; "but," he continued, "I have only chosen the first piece. After that the band will play whatever you wish."

The first piece must have been more or less to Rossini's taste, for it was the overture to the "Barber

of Seville." So, at least, says Mr. Ebers. M. Azevedo says it was the overture to "La Gazza Ladra;" at all events it was an overture by Rossini.

The maestro was pleased with the king's attention, and seems to have thought the performance really good. He had in the meanwhile found out from Mayer, the conductor of the orchestra, what were the king's favourite pieces, and asked for them, pointing out during the execution their characteristic beauties. Finally, he said to Mayer that he had never heard "God save the King," except on the piano, and that he should like to hear it performed by his excellent band. The king accepted this as a return compliment for the choice of the overture, and was evidently gratified.

Rossini used to say that Alexander I. of Russia, and George IV. of England, were the two most amiable crowned heads he had ever met; and he assured Ferdinand Hiller that "of the charm of George IV.'s personal appearance and demeanour it was scarcely possible to form an idea."

During the progress of the concert in the

music-hall of the Pavilion, George IV. presented Rossini to all the principal personages of the court; and the effect of this introduction from the sovereign himself was shown in the formation of a committee of lady patronesses, who organised two concerts at Almack's for Rossini's benefit at two guineas a ticket.

All the principal singers in London offered Rossini their services, and would not hear of remuneration. The orchestra, chorus, and copyists had alone to be paid, and the receipts were enormous. The only thing that displeased Rossini in the matter was the refusal of the highly exclusive committee to give him some tickets for the artists who had offered him their gratuitous assistance.

At the first concert Rossini produced a cantata, of which as little seems to be known in the present day as of the Opera which he had undertaken to write for the King's Theatre. The cantata was called "Homage to Byron;" it was written for a single voice, chorus and orchestra, and Rossini himself sang the solo. At a second concert he joined the celebrated Madame Catalani in the duet "Se fiato" from "Il Matrimonio Segretto," and both

in the solo and in the duet was enthusiastically applauded.

Of course, too, Madame Rossini-Colbran took part in these concerts, the attractiveness of which was further increased by the co-operation of Madame Catalani, Madame Pasta, Curioni, the tenor, Placci, the bass, and all the principal singers of the King's Theatre.

It is satisfactory to know that Rossini preserved some agreeable recollections of his visit to London. He told Ferdinand Hiller that until he went to England, he was never able to save a farthing; and it was something, after all, to gain there in four months more than he had gained in Italy during his whole career.

"From the beginning," he said,* "I had an opportunity of observing how disproportionately singers were paid in comparison with composers. If the composer got fifty ducats, the singer received a thousand. Italian operatic composers might formerly write heaven knows how many operas, and

* Conversations with Rossini by Ferdinand Hiller.—*Musical World*, 1856.

yet only be able to exist miserably. Things hardly went otherwise with myself until my appointment under Barbaja."

"'Tancredi' was your first opera which really made a great hit, maestro; how much did you get for it?"

"Five hundred francs," replied Rossini; "and when I wrote my last Italian opera, 'Semiramide,' and stipulated for five thousand francs, I was looked upon, not by the impresario alone, but by the entire public, as a kind of pickpocket."

"You have the consolation of knowing," said Hiller, "that singers, managers, and publishers have been enriched by your means."

"A fine consolation," replied Rossini. "Except during my stay in England, I never gained sufficient by my art to be enabled to put by anything; and even in London I did not get money as a composer, but as an accompanyist."

"But still," observed Hiller, "that was because you were a celebrated composer."

"That is what my friends said," replied Rossini, "to decide me to do it. It may have been prejudice, but I had a kind of repugnance to being paid for

accompanying on the piano, and I have only done so in London. However, people wanted to see the tip of my nose, and to hear my wife. I had fixed for our co-operation at musical soirées the tolerably high price of fifty pounds—we attended somewhere about sixty such soirées, and that was after all worth having. In London, too, musicians will do anything to get money, and some delicious facts came under my observation there. For instance, the first time that I undertook the task of accompanyist at a soirée of this description, I was informed that Puzzi, the celebrated horn-player, and Dragonetti, the more celebrated contrebassist, would also be present. I thought they would perform solos; not a bit of it! They were to assist me in accompanying. 'Have you, then, your parts to accompany these pieces?' I asked them.

"'Not we,' was their answer; 'but we get well paid, and we accompany as we think fit.'

"These extemporaneous attempts at instrumentation struck me as rather dangerous, and I therefore begged Dragonetti to content himself with giving a few pizzicatos, when I winked at him and Puzzi to strengthen the final cadenzas with a few notes,

which, as a good musician, as he was, he easily invented for the occasion. In this manner things went off without any disastrous results, and every one was pleased."

"Delicious," exclaimed Hiller. "Still it strikes me that the English have made great progress in a musical point of view. At the present time a great deal of good music is performed in London—it is well performed, and listened to attentively—that is to say, at public concerts. In private drawing-rooms music still plays a sorry part, and a great number of individuals, totally devoid of talent, give themselves airs of incredible assurance, and impart instruction on subjects of which their knowledge amounts to about nothing."

"I knew in London a certain X., who had amassed a large fortune as a teacher in singing and the pianoforte," said Rossini, "while all he understood was to play a little, most wretchedly, on the flute. There was another man, with an immense connection, who did not even know the notes. He employed an accompanyist, to beat into his head the pieces he afterwards taught, and to accompany him in his lessons; but he had a good voice."

CHAPTER II.

ROSSINI'S OPERA FOR THE KING'S THEATRE.

DURING that season of 1824, which, at the King's Theatre was so "successful," that Mr. Ebers lost only seven thousand pounds, there certainly was no lack of money among the amateurs of London, for Madame Catalani, between the months of January and May, realised as much as ten thousand pounds, while Rossini and his wife are said to have gained seven thousand pounds—just what Mr. Ebers lost.

The small gains of the composer, and the large gains of the singer, have often been contrasted. But what a contrast is offered by the singer's large gains and the manager's large losses! A book, entitled "Operatic Martyrs," might be written, showing how many fortunes have been lost, and who have lost them, in carrying on the struggle so gallantly maintained in England during the last century and a half in support of Italian Opera.

In Handel's time, when opera was first set going in this country, the king, the court, certain members of the aristocracy, would subscribe to give the unfortunate manager some little chance—to give him, at least, enough "law" to prevent his being run down before the end of the season. When the English nobility became tired of offering their very modest contributions in support of art, the manager still went on failing; but rich dilettante speculators were found ready to throw their treasures into the gulf—Mr. Caldas, a wine merchant; Mr. Ebers, a librarian; Mr. Chambers, a banker; Mr. Delafield, a brewer.

Indeed, nothing is more certain than that opera as a speculation must always fail in England,—except that fresh operatic speculators will always be found ready to fail again.

The reason of these constant collapses may be explained by simple arithmetic. The English managers, without a subvention and with heavy rent to pay, have to make their remuneration to artistes at least equal to that of foreign managers who have no rent to pay, and are in the receipt of a heavy subvention.

For instance, in Mr. Ebers's time, the manager of the Italian Opera of Paris was in a better position than the manager of the Italian Opera in London by fifteen thousand pounds a season, or three thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds a month.

Mr. Ebers paid ten thousand pounds a year for the King's Theatre—practically, ten thousand pounds for a term or season of four months.

The manager of the Italian Opera in Paris paid no rent, and received a subvention of one hundred and twenty thousand francs, or four thousand eight hundred pounds.

The expenses, then, of the English manager were greater than those of the French manager by nearly fifteen thousand pounds, and he had to spend at least as much as his competitor (in fact, rather more,) in salaries to singers and musicians.

The prices of admission were, it is true, considerably higher in London than in Paris, as they are now; but to induce the public to pay these prices, it has always been found necessary to engage an unusually large number of first-rate artistes for London. In fine, the English manager has to spend

more money in salaries than the French manager; he has a heavy rent to pay, and he receives no assistance from the government. If Mr. Ebers, in the year 1824, had been in the same position as the manager of the Italian Opera in Paris, instead of losing seven thousand pounds, he would have gained about eight thousand.

The position of the English manager relatively to that of foreign managers (not only in Paris, but in St. Petersburgh, Berlin, Vienna, &c.) remains in principle the same. He is weighted in the race, and always ends by ruining himself, or his backers, or both.—*Bankrupturus vos salutat* is the fitting motto of the British impresario on entering the managerial arena.

However, it is not true, as M. Azevedo imagines, that the manager of the King's Theatre was so unsuccessful the year of Rossini's visit, that he could not get through the season. On the contrary, we have seen that Mr. Ebers got through triumphantly—with the loss of only seven thousand pounds. He did not, according to the announcement made to the public, bring out Rossini's opera;

but it is not at all certain that in this matter Rossini himself was not to blame.

Indeed, the history of the opera Rossini was to compose for London, and of which he certainly finished one act, is very imperfect: and we have an English and a French version of the matter, which are, in some points, quite contradictory.

M. Azevedo says, that the libretto was entitled "La Figlia dell 'Aria;" that Rossini was to receive six thousand francs for the opera, in three instalments; that he completed and delivered the first act; that he was unable to get paid for it; and that the manuscript was still at the King's Theatre when he quitted London, after empowering a friend to take proceedings for its recovery—in spite of which, it seems never afterwards to have been heard of.

But Mr. Ebers being manager of the King's Theatre at the time, must have known something about the matter, and according to his version the opera was entitled "Ugo re d'Italia," and the only defaulter was Rossini, who did not supply it according to his agreement.

Mr. Ebers says that Rossini had promised at the beginning of the season in January, to compose

the work; but that after it had been repeatedly announced for performance, it appeared at the end of May that it was "only half finished."

That is to say, the first act was finished, on the delivery of which, Rossini should have received his second instalment.

But Rossini had at this time, says Mr. Ebers, quarrelled with the management [cause not given], and accepted the post of director at the Italian Opera of Paris; and he adds, that the score of the opera, or rather of the first act, was deposited with Messrs. Ransom, the bankers. To finish the story, Messrs. Ransom, asked by the present writer for information on the subject, declare that they never had a score of Rossini's in their possession.

It would appear, then, that an entire act by Rossini got somehow lost in London, and it will have been observed, that there is a discrepancy between the English and French versions of the affair as to the title of the missing work. M. Azevedo, M. Félix Clement, and the French biographers of Rossini, generally call it "La Figlia dell' Aria." Mr. Ebers, who says it was actually announced for representation, calls it "Ugo re d'Italia."

To make the matter still more confused, not "Ugo," but "Ottone re d'Italia" appears in Zanolini's catalogue as the title of one of Rossini's complete operas, and this "Ottone re d'Italia" is said by M. Azevedo to be nothing more than "Adelaida di Borgogna" under another name.

The general result, then, of Rossini's visit to London may be thus summed up. As a composer he did worse than nothing; for he wrote an entire act, which was lost, or which at least he was never able to recover. He also produced "Zelmira," with his wife in the principal part; but the music, though greatly admired by connoisseurs, made no impression on the public.

The other feature in the result was the seven thousand pounds; but though this sum may have given Rossini a high idea of English liberality, the general inability to appreciate "Zelmira," and the bungling or bad faith manifested in connection with his opera, "Ugone re d'Italia," or "La Figlia dell' Aria,"—whichever it was,—must have made him think but poorly of England as an artistic country.

CHAPTER III.

ROSSINI IN PARIS.

Rossini's journey to London was not merely an excursion from Paris. But he started from Paris to come to London; he returned to Paris as soon as he had made his seven thousand pounds, and, owing, no doubt, to his horror of sea water, never paid us the compliment of calling again.

M. Castil-Blaze, whose works on musical subjects are full of interesting information, but quite without order, tells us somewhere that large sums were offered to Rossini if he would only put on the jacket of *Figaro* and appear at the Italian Opera of London in his own immortal "Barber." But this proposition was not likely to suit Rossini, and it is even to be feared that concert singing was not altogether to his taste, though he managed to go through a certain amount of it when he was in London, in consideration of the few hundreds a week that it brought him.

Nor was he above giving lessons during this brief but lucrative visit to England; and a story is told of his having once accompanied the vocal efforts of George IV. himself. The king made a mistake and was about to stop, but as Rossini went on he did the same. He afterwards spoke of having got into the wrong key, and of Rossini's continuing to play as though nothing had happened.

"It was my duty to accompany your Majesty," replied Rossini. "I am ready to follow you wherever you may go."

Before coming to London Rossini had been uncertain whether to return to Paris or not. At least he had not accepted a proposition made to him by the Duke de Lauriston to undertake the direction of the Italian Opera in Paris. He agreed to it, however, when the offer was renewed to him in London by Prince Polignac, the French ambassador, and it was made the basis of a formal contract, which Rossini signed in the prince's presence.

Rossini's arrival in the French capital was the signal for the renewal of disputes as to the merit of his music compared with the good old national

music of the country he had come to reside in. It was a feeble attempt to get up the same sort of feud which had divided all Paris when an attempt was made to introduce Italian Opera seventy years before.

Until the end of the eighteenth century the French were unable to understand, or unwilling to acknowledge, the immense superiority of the Italians in everything pertaining to music; and in 1752 the performance of Pergolese's "Serva Padrona" by an Italian company caused a series of pitched battles between the partisans of French and Italian opera, the end of which was that "La Serva Padrona" was hissed, and the two singers who appeared in it driven from Paris.

As the French, however, progressed in the study and knowledge of music, so did they progress in their appreciation of the music of the Italians; and the little cabal got up against Rossini when he went to Paris in the year 1824, had no power to injure him.

But Rossini's relations with the Parisians had commenced in December the year previous. Before coming to London he had passed a month in Paris, during which time the sentiments of the musicians and amateurs of France towards their illustrious visitor had manifested themselves clearly enough. A

representation of the "Barber of Seville" was given in Rossini's honour immediately after his arrival. The composer on appearing in the theatre was received with great demonstrations of enthusiasm, and at the end of the first act was called on to the stage—at that time a novel and distinguished compliment. In the music lesson scene, Garcia pronounced with significant emphasis the words "Giovvane di gran genio!" which was the signal for renewed applause.

A dinner was given to Rossini a few days afterwards, at which Auber, Hérold, Boieldieu, Garcia, Horace Vernet, Madame Pasta, Mademoiselle Mars, and other artistic celebrities were present.

The toasts were interesting and characteristic. Lesueur, the greatest composer of the French school, began by proposing the health of Rossini, "whose ardent genius has opened a new road and marked a new epoch in musical art."

Rossini replied by proposing "The French school and the prosperity of the Conservatoire;" and the formal, indispensable toasts having been disposed of, Lesueur drank to Glück, Boieldieu to Méhul, Hérold to Paisiello, Auber to Cimarosa, and Rossini to Mozart.

M. Scribe, then just beginning his career, made the banquet to Rossini the subject of a vaudeville, called "Rossini à Paris, ou le Grand Diner." Rossini was invited to attend the rehearsal, and if any passages in the work displeased him to point them out. He went to the rehearsal, but nothing seems to have displeased him except the airs to which the vaudeville couplets were sung.

"If that is their national music," he said, "I shall do no good here, and may as well pack up my things at once."

It was a proof of good nature on the part of Rossini, better still of good sense, not to be offended by the vaudeville of which his arrival in Paris had been made the subject, and which, by the way, seems to have been the model of fifty similar works, showing how a man coming home from a masquerade may be mistaken for a true Eastern prince, a chorus singer for a great prima donna, a Quaker bearing the name of a prize-fighter, for the prize-fighter himself, &c., &c.

The piece entitled "Rossini à Paris" caused a good deal of excitement. There was a strong "national" party in the house, who wanted to know why an Italian composer should be set above com-

posers of French origin (a mystery which Auber, Hérold, and Boieldieu could easily have explained), and who were pleased to see the enthusiastic admirers of Rossini exhibited as grotesque fanatics. On the other hand, many of Rossini's friends, taking perhaps an unduly serious view of a piece of pleasantry, thought that M. Scribe had treated the great composer with too much levity.

A great deal has been said about the intrigues against Rossini, and the attacks made upon his music in the newspapers on his first arrival in Paris. Writers in the present day are astonished that writers in that day should have been so unjust. Musicians are not astonished that writers at any time should have been so ignorant.

After reading the extracts from the journals of the period, given by Stendhal, and by M. Azevedo, it is easy to see that Rossini was not nearly so ill-treated as is generally supposed; and it is worth noticing that the most important and persistent of the adverse criticisms and all the organised hostility proceeded from musicians. Indeed it is difficult to understand how any man with a natural taste for music, and a more or less cultivated ear, unless

hampered by professional prejudices or professional interests, would not be charmed by the music of Rossini.

Among the enemies of Rossini in Paris were a few obscure journalists, who held absurd theories on the subject of French music and Italian music, music which appealed only to the senses, and music which appealed to the heart, &c.; but the chief of the cabal were Berton, the composer of "Montano et Stéphanie," and Paer, the then celebrated Italian composer, who held the office of musical conductor at the Italian Opera of Paris.

Berton may have been quite sincere in not liking the brilliant dramatic music of the young Italian maestro, and he doubtless found sincere supporters among elderly amateurs, whose admiration for the milder and more meagre music of a previous age was connected with all sorts of impressions and associations of their youth. The music of Paisiello and Cimarosa was the music of their first love. Now when they went to hear Rossini's music the gout troubled them.

As for Berton, who was treated by the Rossinists of the period as nothing less than a malefactor, and

who was certainly of a mean and envious disposition, he began by criticising the music of the new and rising composer, severely, no doubt, and, in an artistic sense, unjustly; but it was not until he had been provoked by rejoinders—it was in the heat of discussion—that he uttered his grand absurdity, "que M. Rossini ne serait jamais qu'un petit discoureur en musique." Stendhal quotes a letter of Berton's from "L'Abeille," in which the worst that the French composer of the past has to say against the Italian composer of the present and the future is what follows:—

"M. Rossini has a brilliant imagination, verve, originality, great fecundity; but he knows that he is not always pure and correct; and, whatever certain persons may say, purity of style is not to be disdained, and faults of syntax are never excusable. Besides, since the writers of our daily journals constitute themselves judges in music, having qualified myself by 'Montano,' 'Le Délire,' 'Aline,' &c., I think I have the right to give my opinion ex professo. I give it frankly and sign it, which is not done by certain persons who strive incognito to make and unmake reputations. All

this has been suggested only by the love of art and in the interest of M. Rossini himself. This composer is beyond contradiction the most brilliant talent that Italy has produced since Cimarosa; but one may deserve to be called celebrated without being on an equality with Mozart."

To understand the position and attitude of Berton in the war which for a time raged in Paris on the subject of Rossini's merit, it is necessary to remember that the praise lavished upon the Italian composer was not only extravagant in regard to Rossini himself (which might be excused as the natural product of enthusiasm), but also unjust to other composers.

Berton, with all his love for art in the abstract, thought no doubt much more of his own reputation than of the reputation of Mozart; but Boieldieu seems also to have thought that the "Rossinists" were carrying their idolatry rather too far.

"The French Rossinists," says Boieldieu, in a letter dated 1823,* "want to put us completely under the feet of their idol. But the Italian Ros-

* This letter was made public at a sale of autographs which took place in Paris last March, and was printed by most of the French papers immediately afterwards.

sinists, and Rossini himself, are more just. He has no need of that to raise himself; his great talent will always put him in his proper place. If people would be reasonable, they would do in musical matters what is done in literature and in painting; it is possible to have Dante, and Tasso, and others, in the same library, and to admire Rubens and Raphael in the same gallery. Honour to Rossini, but honour also to Mozart, Glück, Cimarosa, &c. Rossini, with whom I have conversed a great deal, is quite of the same way of thinking. He has made a style of his own by taking, from other styles, examples which have guided him."

Indeed, Boieldieu, Hérold, Auber, were all fervent admirers of Rossini, and all to a certain extent adopted him as a model. Hérold was "*maestro al piano*" at the Italian theatre of Paris when Rossini was director, and may almost be said to have studied under him. The influence of Rossini upon Auber was equally remarkable. With regard to Auber's personal opinion of Rossini, and of his sentiments towards him when Rossini first visited Paris, the following passage* from a highly inte-

* D. F. E. Auber, sa Vie et ses Œuvres. Par B. Jouvin.

resting memoir of Auber, by M. Jouvin (well known to readers of the Paris *Figaro*), may be quoted:—

"M. Auber has told me," says M. Jouvin, "how he met Rossini for the first time at a dinner given by Carafa in honour of his illustrious compatriot. On rising from table the maestro, at the request of his host, went to the piano and sang *Figaro's* cavatina, 'Largo al fattotum della cita.'

"I shall never forget," said M. Auber to me, "the effect produced by his lightning-like execution. Rossini had a very beautiful baritone voice, and he sang his music with a spirit and verve which neither Pellegrini, nor Galli, nor Lablache approached in the same part. As for his art as an accompanyist, it was marvellous; it was not on a keyboard, but on an orchestra that the vertiginous hands of the pianist seemed to gallop. When he had finished I looked mechanically at the ivory keys; I fancied I could see them smoking. On arriving home I felt much inclined to throw my scores into the fire. 'It will warm them, perhaps,' I said to myself; 'besides, what is the use of composing music, if one cannot compose like Rossini?'"

With Auber, Hérold, and Boieldieu on his side, it does not matter much what the views of any other of the French composers may have been.

As for Paer, the director of the Italian theatre, his position did not allow him to express any opinion publicly on the works of the rival by whose fame his own had already been eclipsed. But that position gave him, as we shall afterwards see, the opportunity of carrying on war against him in a much more practical manner. Paer possessed the right of keeping back Rossini's operas, of presenting them as he thought fit, and finally, of producing, as if in contrast, works by other composers, whom Rossini's adverse critics declared to be altogether his superiors.

Some years later, a few nights after the production of "Guillaume Tell," a serenade was given to Rossini, by the artists of the Opera, under the direction of Habeneck, the *chef d'orchestre*. Méry, in the preface to his French version of "Semiramide," has given a lively description of the scene.

"Habeneck," he says, "conducted his army on to the boulevard, and made it execute the overture

to 'Guillaume Tell.' Soulié, the charming writer of 'La Quotidienne,' had brought up a crowd of Royalists; Armand Marrast, Carrel, Rabbe, and myself, represented the Liberal journals. The applause shook the windows on the boulevard; and the enthusiasm became really frantic when Levasseur, Nourrit, and Dabadie, sang the trio of the oath.

"Boieldieu, that musician of genius and of heart, who lodged in the same house, went down to Rossini and embraced him.

"Paer and Berton sat at the Café des Variétés, taking an ice, and saying to one another, in a duet, 'Art is lost!'"

Why, it may be asked, does Méry point out that Rossini's music, in the year 1829, was applauded both by Royalists and Liberals?

The explanation is, that the question of Rossini's merit had become, to a certain extent, a political question, like the disputes between the Gluckists and the Piccinnists; and at an earlier period (1752) between the supporters of Italian and the supporters of French music.

Shortly before the French Revolution of 1789, the party of Marie Antoinette believed only in Gluck, while the party of Madame Dubarry swore by Piccinni.

During the Restoration and until the Revolution of 1830, it was the sign of a good royalist to praise Rossini's music, and a sign of liberalism to condemn it. This had nothing whatever to do with Rossini's own political opinions, which were never very marked. But Rossini's music and the romantic school of poetry and painting were classed together, and the romantic school, with Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and Alfred de Vigny at its head, began by being royalist.

Balzac describes somewhere a hero of this period as devoted to "Byron's poetry, Géricault's painting, Rossini's music;" and persons who entertained these tastes were looked upon as Royalists, and denounced accordingly by the Liberals.

It was absurd, but so it was. Of course, too, there were limits to the absurdity; and it must have been near its end when Armand Carrel went out on the boulevard to applaud the overture to "Guillaume Tell."

CHAPTER IV.

ROSSINI AND HIS CRITICS.

"Now I think of it," said Rossini, a great many years afterwards, to Ferdinand Hiller, "what was not written against me when I went to Paris! Old Berton even made verses on me, and called me 'Signor Crescendo' in them. But it all blew over without injury to life or limb."

Rossini was too philosophical, and, without being in the least vain, was sufficiently conscious, no doubt, of his own talent to care much what was thought of his music either by ordinary critics or by the general public. At the first performance of the "Barber," when everyone was hissing, he turned round and applauded.

He himself said that he was tolerably calm at a success as well as at a failure; "and for this," he added, "I have to thank an impression I received in my earliest youth, and which I shall never forget.

Before my first operetta was brought out I was present at the performance of a one-act opera by Simon Mayer. Mayer was then the hero of the day, and had produced in Venice perhaps twenty operas with the greatest success. In spite of this, however, the public treated him on the evening to which I refer as if he had been some ignorant young vagabond; you cannot form an idea of such a piece of grossness. I was really astounded. Is it thus that you recompense a man who for so many years has produced you enjoyment? Dare you take such a liberty because you have paid two or three paoli for admittance? If such is the case, it is not worth while to take your judgment to heart, I thought; and I have always acted as much as possible in conformity with that opinion."

In regard to printed criticism, he showed himself more considerate to critics than critics sometimes showed themselves to him. When Weber was passing through Paris, in 1826, on his way to London, he called on Rossini, but hesitated before doing so on the ground that a dozen years before he had published a hostile criticism on "Tancredi."

Instead of feeling any resentment, Rossini said

that if he had only known when he was twenty-one that a foreign composer had taken any notice of "Tancredi" he should certainly have felt very much flattered by the attention.

But the malicious Berton did not confine himself to criticising Rossini's music, he attempted to cast ridicule on Rossini personally, whom he called, among other facetious nicknames, "Signor Vacarmini," and "Signor Crescendo." This could not please Rossini, but he did not mind the impertinence very much.

Rossini had, of course, been preceded in Paris by his reputation, and his reputation by his music. But it was not until the public had learned its true superiority from the very manœuvre which Paer had adopted in order to demonstrate its worthlessness that Rossini's music was accepted by the Parisians at anything like its value.

"L'Italiana in Algeri" had already been played in Paris, in the year 1817, when Garcia, the original *Almaviva*, proposed that the "Barber" should be produced for his benefit.

Publishers were not so expeditious then as they are now in getting out the scores of new operas, and

the music of the "Barber" had not at that time been engraved, or at least not in a complete form. Garcia, however, had provided himself with a manuscript copy, and in spite of repeated objections from Paer and others, continued to request that the work might be put into rehearsal.

The first reply with which Garcia was met is worth recording. The directors of the Italian Opera of Paris informed him that "only masterpieces could be performed at their theatre, and that "Il Barbiere," a work of secondary merit, by an author almost unknown, was not worthy of being presented to the Parisian public."

Garcia, however, was of a different opinion; and in renewing his engagement for the year following, made it a special condition that the "Barber" should be brought out. Accordingly in the autumn of the following year, 1819, this "work of secondary merit" was actually represented.

The audience *must* have been delighted; but several critics were not. One thought that *Figaro's* cavatina was "wanting in character!" and added, with super-journalistic absurdity, that "the composer might have made much more out of the air of

"La Calunnia." Another said of it that "its success would serve to enhance that of "Agnese," a very celebrated opera of that day by Paer; a third, that Paisiello's "Barber" ought to be given, and with particular care, so that the triumph of the old master over his competitor "might be rendered not more sure, but more striking."

The hint was meant to be acted upon, and Paisiello's veteran "Barber," supported only by stringed instruments, was brought out to crush the vigorous young "Barber" of Rossini, full of life, and with musical instruments of all kinds to depend upon. Paisiello had been the favourite Italian composer of the Empire (the Emperor, according to Paisiello's own naive observation, liked his music "because it did not prevent his thinking of other things);" but his "Barber" had grown old and feeble apparently, without anyone suspecting the change.

Three times this respectable but unattractive musical invalid was brought forth; the third time there was scarcely anyone to meet him; and Paisiello's "Barber" was not heard of again, until, only a few years ago, he was introduced to the

public of "Les Fantaisies Parisiennes," not as the possible competitor of anyone, but merely as an interesting relic of a past age.

In the meanwhile Rossini's "Barber" had been reproduced, to be followed by "Il Turco in Italia," "La Pietra del Paragone," and "La Gazza Ladra." With the general public Rossini's music was now in the highest favour, and "La Gazza Ladra," like "Il Barbiere," drew crowded audiences.

The late M. Berlioz, whose antipathy to Rossini's music was so great as to be absolutely unintelligible to those who have not heard M. Berlioz's music), had not at that time the ear—I mean, of course, the literary ear—of the French public. Otherwise, without delaying Rossini's triumph, he certainly would have increased the number of Rossini's enemies.

"If," he afterwards said, "it had been in my power to place a barrel of powder under the Salle Louvois and blow it up, during the representation of "La Gazza Ladra" or "Il Barbiere," with all that it contained, I certainly should not have failed to do so."

This was worse than the young Milanese drum-

hater, who wished to murder Rossini, but Rossini only, for his overture to "La Gazza Ladra."

Rossini insisted on being introduced to the eccentric student of Milan. Had he known of Berlioz's existence he would have wanted to cultivate his intimate acquaintance.

CHAPTER V.

ROSSINI AT THE ITALIAN OPERA OF PARIS.

THE ingenious Berton, in his anti-Rossinian pamphlet entitled "De la Musique mécanique et de la Musique philosophique," relates how he once asked Maelzel, the metronomist, whether he could construct a machine to compose music; to which Maelzel replied that he could, but that the music so composed would be like that of Rossini, and not up to the mark of Sacchini, Cimarosa and Mozart.

Somehow Maelzel abstained from proving his terrible power; but Berton boasted that his friend possessed it, and argued therefrom that Rossini's music could not be anything very sublime, but on the contrary, must be essentially mechanical.

But Berton ceased this folly when Rossini arrived in Paris, and even showed a disposition to treat him with civility and respect. He is said to have secretly

endeavoured to keep up the national cry against the composer; but the verses about "Signor Vacarmini" and "Signor Crescendo" were written while Rossini was still in Italy.

Paer, too, saw that the time had gone by for describing Rossini's operas as "works of secondary importance." He was accused long afterwards of doing his best to undermine Rossini's reputation as a great musician, but, as it seems to me, without sufficient proof. In these musical feuds, in which perhaps the opposing parties are irreconcileable in proportion as the ground of difference between them is incapable of being defined, every sort of meanness is attributed by one side to the other as a matter of course.

Rossini made Berton's acquaintance in Paris, and must have had frequent relations with Paer at the Italian Opera, of which he at last assumed the direction.

In this matter Rossini behaved with great consideration towards his jealous rival. He positively declined to displace Paer, and on being pressed to accept the post of director, consented to do so only on condition of Paer's remaining at the theatre

without a diminution of salary, but, on the contrary, with a slight increase.

The salary payable to Rossini from the Civil List, in virtue of his office as Director of the Italian Theatre, was twenty thousand francs a year. The engagement was for eighteen months.

Rossini not only knew his work well and practically as director of an orchestra, but was also thoroughly versed in all the duties of manager. He began his artistic life as conductor. When he was a boy at the Lyceum of Bologna, he got up a quartet of stringed instruments, and superintended the production of some important orchestral pieces.

"You should have been present," he once said, "when I directed the performance of the 'Creation' at the Liceo; I did not let the executants miss a single point, for I knew every note by heart."

As for the details of management, though M. Fétis thinks Rossini must have been incapable of descending to such things, he assured Hiller that when he was at the San Carlo he attended to all Barbaja's affairs, great and small, so that not a bill was paid until he had countersigned it.

In Paris so much could scarcely have been required of him. But it seems so improbable that a composer like Rossini should also be a good manager, that many persons, with that comprehensively inaccurate writer, M. Fétis, among the number, have at once concluded that he must have neglected his work.

He was, of course, not expected to wait "in the front of the house" to see that the public were provided with proper accommodation. His business was to bring out new singers, to produce new operas, and especially his own; and there was, naturally, no one in Europe who could discharge these duties in so advantageous a manner as Rossini.

In fact, he engaged his old friend, Esther Mombelli, the first of his prima donnas, for "La Cenerentola," in which her success surpassed that of the original heroine, Madame Giorgi-Righetti; he brought over from Italy two of the most celebrated tenors of the day, Donzelli and Rubini; he appointed Herold *maestro al piano*; he produced Meyerbeer's "Crociato," his own "Otello," and "Donna del Lago;" and finally he composed specially for the theatre "Il Viaggio a Reims," the

chief portion of which was afterwards reproduced in that charming work, "Le Comte Ory."

"Il Viaggio a Reims," an occasional piece composed in honour of Charles X.'s coronation, was, nominally, in only one act, but the act was a long one. It lasted three hours; it contained fifteen or sixteen pieces, including a ballet; and it was divided into three parts. The execution must have been admirable, the characters being assigned to Mesdames Pasta, Esther Mombelli and Cinti; MM. Donzelli, Zuchelli, Levasseur, Bordogni, Pellegrini, and Graziani.

The music of "Il Viaggio a Reims," if we except the numerous important pieces transferred to "Le Comte Ory," is now only known by report. In the ballet music a duet for two clarinets was particularly remarked. There were two elaborate finales (for a piece in one act a fair supply!), and in the second finale the national airs of nearly all the countries in Europe were introduced. Prominent among them was, of course, the French royalist air, "Vive Henri Quatre," which was harmonised in the most varied manner, and presented finally with an elaborate and quasi-religious accompaniment for the harp.

"Il Viaggio a Reims," having been written for the coronation of a king in 1825, was revived, with some necessary alterations in the libretto, to celebrate the proclamation of a republic in 1848. It was a droll idea, but it seems to have been adopted and carried out without the slightest satirical intention. "Andiamo a Parigi" the piece was called.

In "Il Viaggio a Reims," some people in an inn are talking about the coronation, and arrange to make a journey to Reims to see the ceremony.

In "Andiamo a Parigi" some people in an inn are talking about the Revolution, and arrange to make a journey to Paris to see the barricades.

The Viscount de la Rochefoucauld, as director of the "Civil List," offered Rossini the present of a large sum of money; but the composer, considering himself already sufficiently well paid, and wishing perhaps that the opera should be looked upon as a homage from him to the French nation and sovereign, declined to accept it. Thereupon a service of Sèvres china was sent to him on the part of the king.

Rossini, too, caused Malibran to be re-engaged (she had appeared at Paris some years previously,

before the full development of her talent, in "Torwaldo e Dorliska"), and introduced to the French public Sontag and Pisaroni, who appeared together in "Tancredi;" Galli, Lablache, and Tamburini. It was Rossini, too, who discovered and brought out Giulia Grisi.

In fact, he raised the Théâtre Italien of Paris to the position of the first Italian Opera in Europe.

Soon after the production of "Il Viaggio," Rossini brought out "Semiramide" and "Zelmira." Indeed, during the eighteen months over which his contract extended, he made the French acquainted with all his greatest works. Add to this that he wrote an entirely new opera for Paris, and that he was the means of introducing Meyerbeer, both through his works and in person, and the sum total of Rossini's doings at the Théâtre Italien will not seem insignificant.

The French public knew nothing of Meyerbeer's music, it is true he had not written much besides "Emma di Rosburgo" and "Il Crociato," when Rossini undertook the production of the latter work at the Théâtre Italien. As soon as the

opera was nearly ready, he asked the Viscount de la Rochefoucauld to invite the composer to attend the last rehearsals; and it was really in consequence of Rossini's express recommendation that Meyerbeer came to Paris.

Rossini was equally the means of bringing Bellini, Donizetti and Mercadante to France. To Bellini in particular he was the kindest possible friend, as may be judged from the following letter, addressed to Rossini by Bellini's father, just after the young man's death.

"You always encouraged the object of my eternal regret in his labours," wrote the unhappy father; "you took him under your protection; you neglected nothing that could increase his glory and his welfare. After my son's death, what have you not done to honour his memory and render it dear to posterity! I learnt this from the newspapers; and I am penetrated with gratitude for your excessive kindness, as well as for that of a number of distinguished artistes, which also I shall never forget. Pray, sir, be my interpreter, and tell these artistes, that the father and family of Bellini, as well as our compatriots of Catana,

will cherish an imperishable recollection of this generous conduct. I shall never cease to remember how much you did for my son; I shall make known everywhere in the midst of my tears what an affectionate heart belongs to the great Rossini; and how kind, hospitable, full of feeling are the artistes of France."

CHAPTER VI.

ROSSINI AT THE ACADÉMIE.

ROSSINI'S engagement as director of the Théâtre Italien came to an end in 1826; but he continued to take part in its management, and rendered great services by his recommendations of singers and composers.

He continued, also, to receive twenty thousand francs a year from the Civil List; and as it was necessary this pension, for such it really was, should be assigned to him in consideration of certain official duties, he was named "Inspector of Singing."

One would have thought "auditor" a better word; but the appointment was chiefly a pretext for keeping Rossini in France, where it was understood that he was to compose a series of works for the French Opera.

Looking back, it is from the date of this new

contract that Rossini's French career would seem to commence. As director of the Théâtre Italien, he had already produced one work; but all the principal pieces in that opera were afterwards transferred to the "Comte Ory" composed for the Académie.

Without thoroughly changing his style, Rossini certainly modified it in writing for the French stage. He became more simple in his musical phrases, which he presented entirely without ornament, and more complex in his vocal and instrumental combinations. M. Azevedo points to Rossini's unsuccessful opera of "Ermione" as an example of what in Rossini's notion, conceived some years before he wrote anything for the French theatre, a dramatic opera should be. But Rossini himself did not entertain any high opinion of that work, and told Ferdinand Hiller that in his endeavour to be exceedingly dramatic, he had only succeeded in being dull—a common result when the composer neglects or is unable to cultivate with felicity the essential lyrical element in opera.

"And your opera, 'Ermione,' which one of your

biographers informs us you preserve mysteriously to bequeath to posterity—what has become of that?" asked Hiller; to which Rossini replied, that it was with his other scores, lost or left at some theatre, he knew not where. To the question whether Rossini had not once said that he had treated "Ermione" too dramatically, and that it was in consequence damned, the maestro replied that the public had judged his work fairly enough, and that it was in truth very tedious. "There was really nothing," he continued; "it was all recitative and declamation."

In fact, so-called dramatic operas, in which the characters, instead of comporting themselves lyrically, instead of singing melodies, declaim recitative in alleged imitation of the language of real life, are about as interesting as tragedies without poetry, or comedies without wit.

In composing for the French stage, Rossini adopted no new theory of the lyric drama. He made his style less ornate, more expressive, and, in doing so, probably did not forget that his ordinary Italian manner would suit neither French singers nor French audiences. A taste, moreover, for simple,

expressive music seems to have grown upon him, and he held, justly no doubt, that with advancing years this taste generally manifested itself.

But wherever we have seen Rossini at work he has always adopted a compromise; he subjects circumstances to himself, but he is also obliged to subject himself a little to circumstances. At many of the Italian theatres he had an indifferent orchestra and chorus—sometimes, as at the San Mosè, no chorus at all; and his only means of success lay in writing attractive airs for the principal singers.

At the San Carlo, where he found the finest orchestra in Italy, he paid particular attention to the instrumentation of his operas.

At the Académie, where the superiority of the orchestra and chorus was still more remarkable, he thought more than ever of orchestral and choral writing, and was not tempted by special excellence on the part of his singers to sacrifice anything to the vocal solos.

At the same time the Académie was really the first theatre at which Rossini found himself free to pursue his ideal of an opera, if any such ideal possessed him. There, too, he could work at his

leisure, and instead of scrambling through the rehearsals, have just as many as he required. That is one of the numerous advantages presented by a State theatre. A private speculator cannot afford to delay very long the production of a new piece, for by doing so he delays the return of the money he has invested. Such considerations are not important at a Government institution, where singers and instrumentalists are all engaged for a long period and permanently. Besides, at a theatre supported by the Government, the reputation of the establishment is the first thing to be considered.

At Rossini's recommendation, two French artistes, Levasseur and Mademoiselle Cinti, of the Théâtre Italien, were now engaged at the Académie, where the principal tenor was the great dramatic singer, Adolphe Nourrit. Here, then, already was the nucleus of an admirable company. Levasseur and Mademoiselle Cinti were accustomed to the Italian school of vocalisation. Nourrit was less Italianised, but he is said to have profited greatly by the counsels of the great Italian maestro during the production of the works which Rossini now composed or arranged for the French stage.

The first of this series was "Le Siège de Corinthe," based on "Maometto Secondo." Soumet, the French dramatic poet, and Balocchi, the author of "Il Viaggio a Reims," arranged the libretto of the new work, Soumet occupying himself with the dramatic, Balocchi with the lyrical portion.

Although Rossini borrowed for the "Siège de Corinthe" a number of pieces which had already figured in "Maometto," he remodelled many of them. He moreover altered some of the principal airs in a very significant manner, cutting out his Italian *fioriture*, either because he thought them unsuited to the French taste, or to the capacity of the French singers, or because he considered them absolutely undramatic; perhaps for all these reasons.

Although "Le Siège de Corinthe" is often spoken of as a mere French adaptation of "Maometto Secondo," it does not include more than half the pieces contained in the latter work; while, on the other hand, Rossini composed specially for it the magnificent overture, the recitative, "Nous avons triomphé," the allegro of the finale to the first act, the ballad "L'Hymen lui donne," the recitative "Que vais-je devenir?" the allegro of the duet in

the second act, "La Fête d'Hyménée," the whole of the ballet music, the chorus "Divin Prophète," the trio "Il est son Frère," the finale to the second act "Corinthe nous défie," the entre-acte preceding the third act, the recitative "Avançons!" the air "Grand Dieu," the recitative of the trio "Cher Cléomène," the scene of the Blessing of the Standards, and the finale to the third act.

The scene of the Blessing of the Standards is conceived in Rossini's grandest and broadest dramatic style,—a style which he did not adopt absolutely for the first time in writing for the French stage, since we had already an example of it in the magnificent finale to the first act of "La Donna del Lago," but which he nevertheless carried out more consistently and with more success in France than he could possibly have done in Italy, where it will be remembered "La Donna del Lago" was not by any means appreciated.

The production of "Le Siège de Corinthe" was accompanied by one rather important incident in Rossini's life, in which, indeed, it may be said to form an epoch. It was the first opera that he sold to a music publisher. His thirty-four Italian works had

been left absolutely at the disposition of every publisher or manager who chose to take them, to engrave or represent, with or without additions, in no matter what form; the one thing clear and certain in the matter being that no profit from the sale or representation of his works could by any possibility reach the composer.

The composer received from twenty to one hundred pounds for writing an opera, and was allowed the privilege of keeping a copy of his work, which, if he could manage it, he might sell to a publisher not less than one year after its first performance. Only, as the copyright expired altogether two years after the first performance, the privilege granted by the managers was practically of no value. In short, he received nothing for the right of engraving his works, and only one very moderate payment for the right of representing them.

The one Italian opera for which Rossini obtained two hundred pounds was thought to be shamefully overpaid. It was "Semiramide," and Rossini himself said that he was looked upon as little better than a pickpocket when he asked and obtained five thousand francs for it. The admirable legislation on

behalf of dramatists and their works, introduced in France by the author of "Le Barbier de Séville," was of no profit to the composer of "Il Barbiere." The representation of that work alone, if the French system of securing to writers and composers for the stage a certain fixed proportion of the receipts derived from the performance of their pieces had been adopted throughout Europe, would have given Rossini at least one hundred thousand pounds. As it was, it never brought him a farthing beyond the eighty pounds paid to him by the manager of the Argentina theatre for writing it and superintending the rehearsals.* In France alone, if "Il Barbiere" had been originally brought out in that country, Rossini's profits must have amounted to something like one million francs.

Certainly, if it was in Italy that Rossini the composer made his reputation, it was in France that he made his fortune. In England it was not so much Rossini the composer, as Rossini the singer, Rossini the accompanyist, Rossini the man of European reputation, and the friend of George IV., who in

* See the contract for the production of this work, p. 128.

four months, aided by his wife, made seven thousand pounds. Two hundred and forty pounds was all the manager of the Italian Opera of London had offered Rossini for the work he never completed. Indeed, if a composer in England is to make money at all—as a composer—it must be through music publishers, not managers, who, as a rule, pay no more for the right of representation than Rossini received in Italy for copyright.

For although we have not many composers in England, the number is at least much greater than that of our opera managers; so that, when by some rare accident a new opera is produced in this country, it is the manager who seems to benefit, and who really does benefit, the composer. Naturally then he does not give him a sum of money into the bargain. Sometimes quite the contrary.

But the whole of our operatic system is absurd. In fact, at this moment we have no operatic system, the custom still prevalent in other countries of producing original operas having in England died out.

The sum received by Rossini for the copyright of "Le Siège de Corinthe" was not a large one. At

least in these days of international treaties, when, moreover, the sale of music has everywhere increased, it would not be so considered. Troupenas, the afterwards well-known publisher, had then just gone into business, and thought with reason that he could not make a better beginning than by bringing out Rossini's new work, the first of the series of operas which he was to compose for the French stage.

Injudicious friends advised him not to invest his money in an opera only half new; but he was not to be dissuaded from his intention, and ended by purchasing the copyright of "Le Siège de Corinthe" for six thousand francs. If this opera had been produced thirty years later, the music would have been worth to a publisher at least sixty, eighty, perhaps one hundred thousand francs.

But Rossini was never exorbitant in his demands, and seems to have been quite contented with the comparatively moderate payment made to him by M. Troupenas, remembering, no doubt, that in Italy he would have received nothing.

The next of his Italian works which Rossini proposed to arrange for the French stage was "Mosè." M. Balocchi and M. de Jouy, one of the future libret-

tists of "Guillaume Tell," prepared the "book," and added to the original opera several scenes and one or two personages of their own invention. The pieces composed specially by Rossini for the French version of "Mosè," are the introduction to the first act, the quartet with chorus, "Dieu de la Paix," "Dieu de la Guerre," the chorus "La douce Aurore," the march with chorus and recitations in the third act, "Reine des Cieux," a portion of the ballet music, the finale "Je réclame la foi promise," and the air of the fourth act, "Quelle horrible destinée."

The finale, however, is said to be that of "Ciro in Babilonia," remodelled, while most of the dance music came from "Armida."

"Moïse," highly successful on its first production, was revived in 1852, and again in 1863. An Italian version of the work was produced in London some twenty years ago at the Royal Italian Opera. It was, of course, found necessary to reconstruct the drama, which in England became "Zora," as the Italian "Mosè," five-and-twenty years before, had become "Pietro l'Eremita." Notwithstanding the magnificence of the music, the piece, as adapted to the requirements of the English stage

and English society, did not prove generally successful. It was admirably represented, like the rest of the later works by Rossini, which but for the Royal Italian Opera would never have been heard in this country at all.

Having now produced two serious operas at the Académie, Rossini proposed to write for the same theatre a comic opera, or opera "di mezzo carattere," for which the music of "Il Viaggio a Reims," or a good portion of it, was found serviceable. The libretto of "Le Comte Ory," the third work contributed by Rossini to the repertory of the French opera, is founded on a vaudeville of the same name, of which the original subject is taken from an old French song. This time, Rossini had a librettist of some brains. It was M. Scribe, the future author of all Auber's best libretti, and the inventor of several universally known operatic subjects (those, for instance, of "La Sonnambula" and "L'Elisir d'Amore"). Certainly nothing more ingenious, or more perfectly suited in the half character style to musical purposes has ever been produced than Scribe's "book" of "Le Comte Ory," in which

Nourrit, who afterwards gave some valuable hints for "Les Huguenots," is said to have assisted him.

The librettist, or librettists, for there were two, M. Scribe and M. Poirson, had rather arduous labours to perform; for contrary to the usual practice, they had to supply words to music already composed. The writer of a criticism on "Le Comte Ory," published just after its production, says that Messieurs Scribe and Poirson were two months fitting French words to the pieces which Rossini borrowed from "Il Viaggio," while Rossini set the whole of the second act to original music in a fortnight.

Rossini is said not to have been over-pleased with Scribe, whose business-like manner of apportioning his time did not leave him enough to devote to the composer of "Le Comte Ory." It is to be regretted all the same, that Rossini did not apply to Scribe when he was meditating his opera of "Guillaume Tell," which though it contains Rossini's grandest music, is, through the poorness of the libretto, by no means the most perfect work that bears Rossini's name.

"Le Comte Ory," like "Le Siège de Corinthe," "Moïse," and "Guillaume Tell," belongs to the repertory of the Royal Italian Opera, the only theatre in Europe which includes all the great works written for the Académie. In "Le Comte Ory," as in all Rossini's French operas, considerable prominence is given to the orchestral parts. "There is not only much harmony, there is also much melody in the accompaniment," wrote a critic of the period. "The composer," he ingeniously but absurdly adds, "has put the pedestal on the stage and the statue in the orchestra, so that there is more singing in the latter than on the former."

In transferring to "Le Comte Ory" the best things he could find in "Il Viaggio a Reims," Rossini did not forget the piece for fourteen voices, which constitutes one of the great features in the latter, as it did in the former work. Another important piece in "Il Viaggio," which was originally set to a narrative of the battle of Trocadero, became in "Le Comte Ory" a description of the riches contained in the cellars of the Sire de Formoutiers. For the names of the different corps which took part in the battle, names of celebrated wines have

been substituted, and the adaptation has been so well managed, and the intrinsic significance of music is really so very small, that the piece seems to have been originally conceived for the situation which it now occupies in "Le Comte Ory."

This opera, the last but one that Rossini composed, contains the first example of a brief instrumental introduction in lieu of a regular overture. The introduction to "Le Comte Ory" is based on the melody of the old French song from which the subject of the piece is taken.

CHAPTER VII.

"GUILLAUME TELL."

BEFORE attacking "Guillaume Tell," Rossini retired into the country; and this time devoted, not thirteen days to the production of the entire work, as in the case of that comic masterpiece "Il Barbiere," but six months to the pianoforte score alone. It was at the château of M. Aguado, the well-known banker, that Rossini wrote the whole of "Guillaume Tell," with the exception of the orchestral parts. These he added after his return to Paris, where he completed the work among visitors and friends, talking and laughing with them the whole time, as if engaged in some ordinary and not very important pursuit.

Different versions have been given of the engagement which bound Rossini to write so many operas for the Académie. Rossini's salary, as Inspector of

Singing, was, according to M. Azevedo, twenty thousand francs a year. M. Azevedo, in stating this amount, says nothing about any additional engagement in direct connection with the Académie.

M. Castil Blaze, on the other hand, without saying anything about the inspectorship of singing, speaks of a contract, by which Rossini was to write three operas for the Académie in the course of six years, during which period he was to receive ten thousand francs a year in addition to his composer's fees.

M. Guizot, who, as Minister of the Interior in the year 1830, was brought officially into communication with Rossini, tells us in his "Memoirs" that Rossini's salary as Inspector-General of Singing was seven thousand francs a year; and that after the success of "Guillaume Tell" he signed a new contract with the Civil List, by which he engaged to compose two more operas for the Académie—conditions not stated.

However, in the first instance, all Rossini had to go to work upon was the libretto of "Guillaume Tell," as prepared by M. de Jouy. He was accustomed to bad librettos; but the badness of M. de

Jouy's book seems to have been something exceptional.

The preparation of the libretto must have occupied a considerable time, and caused the author or authors infinite trouble. M. de Jouy had, in the first instance, brought Rossini a poem of seven hundred verses, written without any particular view to the one purpose for which librettos should exist. It being impossible for Rossini to do anything with M. de Jouy's libretto as it stood, M. Bis was called in; and to him the whole of the second act, by far the best of the five, is said to be due.

M. Bis, however, found himself placed in rather a delicate position. The composer wished him to turn and return the libretto until he got it into something like shape for the music. M. de Jouy, on the other hand, desired above all to save the honour of his too academical verses; and the result, as usual in such cases, was a compromise which satisfied no one—not even the public.

The authors having at last finished the libretto, but not until they had nobly sacrificed their poetry to the wants of the composer, printed it with a sort of apology in the form of a preface.

"We might have offered," they said, "a more regular work to the reader; it would have been only necessary to publish it as it was first conceived; but then we should have had to restore several scenes which have been suppressed; to put in their original place others, the order of which has been inverted; and to cut out some passages which owe their existence to the requirements of the music alone. Thus the printed piece would have been quite different from the piece performed; and as the spectators desire above all to find in the libretto what the instrumentation does not permit them distinctly to hear, the words, for the first time, perhaps, have been sent to press in exact conformity with those of the score. If, on the one hand, the natural result of this step is to offer a larger field to criticism, on the other, the public will no doubt be grateful to us for a slight sacrifice of self-love made in the interest of its pleasures. We also, it must be confessed, wished to pay an indirect homage to our illustrious associate. It would have been repugnant to our feelings to strike out even the defective verses which the musical rhythm—sometimes fixed upon beforehand — obliged us to

arrange as they are; there are some chords, too, so powerful that they seem to consecrate the words to which they lend their magic. In the midst of this immense and completely new creation which makes Rossini a French composer, 'Guillaume Tell' seems to be the work of one alone—of Rossini."

From this preface it must be concluded, not that Rossini is answerable for the badness of the "Guillaume Tell" libretto as it now stands, but that it would have been much worse if he had not caused numerous alterations to be made. In fact, the preface clearly shows, that in its original form it must have been altogether useless for musical purposes.

Much has been said about the failure, or incomplete success, of Rossini's masterpiece in the serious style; and Rossini's long silence is often attributed to the coldness with which it was received. It was at once appreciated, however, by the critical public, and the applause at the first representation was most enthusiastic. But an opera cannot live by its music alone, and the drama of "Guillaume Tell" is very imperfect. After the first few weeks, in

spite of the well-merited eulogiums of the critical press, the opera ceased, in theatrical parlance, to draw. It was represented fifty-six times in its original form, and was then cut down to three acts; the original third act being entirely omitted, and the fourth and fifth acts compressed into one.

At last the second act was given alone—often as a mere *lever de rideau*, with inferior performers; and it was not until Duprez made his début in the part of *Arnold* that the success of the opera was renewed. For three years before the arrival of Duprez the public heard nothing of "Guillaume Tell" but the celebrated second act.

One day Rossini met the director of the Opera on the boulevard, who said to him,—

"Well, Maestro, you are in the bills again to-night. We play the second act of "Guillaume Tell."

"What! the whole of it?" inquired Rossini, who was naturally much hurt by the mutilation of his work. That alone did not cause him to lay down his pen; but it did not prevent his doing so.

It is to be eternally regretted that Rossini, in

composing his last and greatest work for the stage, did not select some drama better suited for musical treatment than "William Tell." Nevertheless, Schiller's play contains fine situations, and Rossini was never more nobly inspired than in writing the duet for *Tell* and *Arnold;* the trio of the Oath, and the scene of the meeting of the Cantons; all of which owe a great portion of their effect to their position in the drama. The charming air of *Mathilde,* "Sombre forêt," would be equally charming for *Lucia,* or any other sentimental light soprano, waiting for her lover in a wood, or elsewhere; the passionate duet for *Mathilde* and *Arnold* might be sung by any pair of lovers; the enchanting ballet music would make the fortune of any opera. But the pieces first named are of those which belong to "Guillaume Tell," and "Guillaume Tell" alone, and which would, by comparison, fall flat if dissociated from the words, and above all, the dramatic situations to which the composer has attached them.

Whatever we may think of the drama itself, the music which Rossini has composed for it is the most dramatic that has come from his pen; and while

thoroughly dramatic, it is at the same time thoroughly melodious—a combination not to be met with except in the works of the very greatest masters. Indeed, "Guillaume Tell" is full of melody, in the simplest solos as in the most massive choral writing. Rossini said of the compositions of his old professor, Mattei, that "the solo passages were not prominent, but that the *pleni* were admirable." In "Guillaume Tell" the solo passages and the *pleni* are admirable alike. The music, whatever it may have to express, never ceases to be beautiful, and there is in every piece a clear current of melody, which the richest and most varied harmony never obscures.

"Guillaume Tell," Rossini's latest, is also his finest opera. It is written throughout in a higher and more dramatic style than any of his previous works. It exhibits more sustained power, and is the only one of his operas for the French stage in which every piece of music is new and written specially for the situation. The distinctive feature in "Guillaume Tell," as regards form, is the avoidance of the conventional cavatina. It is right and necessary that a libretto should be constructed with a view to

musical as well as dramatic effect; but it is not necessary that each principal singer, on coming before the public, should sing a "cavatina;" nor is it desirable, when a cavatina does happen to fall in with the situation (the opera has its soliloquies as well as the spoken drama), that it should be of a certain recognised pattern, with a few bars of recitative, or slow movement and a cabaletta.

We feel in "Guillaume Tell" that the characters do not appear on the stage merely to sing airs, duets, &c., but as personages in a musical drama. The custom in Italian opera was that each character should sing an air, and sing it as soon as possible after entering. Hence, indeed, the very word "cavatina," from *cavare*, to issue forth. This custom has shown itself far more tenacious than all the others which Rossini broke through. It, indeed, seems to bear the force of an irremissible law; and we find that Rossini's successors, who follow his example as well as they can in all other respects, avoid doing so in this particular one. Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi have all accepted the inevitable cavatina; and Rossini himself, if he had returned to Italy, would doubtless have returned to

the cavatina at the same time,—in which there can be nothing to object to, provided only that it be not dragged in, as is often the case, without the least reference to dramatic propriety.

Of the grand vocal and instrumental combinations, so admirably treated in "Guillaume Tell," Rossini had previously given an example in "La Donna del Lago." But the scene of the meeting of the Cantons in "Guillaume Tell" is far grander. It may, indeed, be cited as the grandest operatic scene that exists—and, moreover, *the grandest of all dramatic scenes in regard to the treatment of masses*, which in the spoken drama can only be employed as a means of spectacular effect. The opera is the only form of drama in which a crowd, an army, a deliberative assembly, can effectually join with voice as well as with gesture in the action of the piece, as it is the only form of drama in which three or four persons, uttering similar or diverse sentiments, can be made to give expression to them at the same time.

The scene of *Vasco di Gama* before the Inquisition, in Meyerbeer's "Africaine," would have a very

poor effect in ordinary drama. The prelates and other members of the tribunal, instead of singing, would of course have to speak; and as they could not speak all at once, they would have to address the unhappy *Vasco* through a single representative instead of crushing him, as in the opera, beneath the weight of their unanimous condemnation. Such a scene, again, as the Market-scene in "Masaniello," in which the chattering of the dealers and the hurry and bustle of the crowd are made, through beautiful and appropriate music, to form one harmonious whole, could only be faintly and imperfectly imitated on the non-operatic stage by a representation in dumb-show, for spoken words would be worse than useless. Similarly, the meeting of the Cantons, in "Guillaume Tell," is a magnificent subject for an operatic scene, which, treated otherwise than operatically, would be as flat and dull as a procession of the Reform League.

How, indeed, could the descent of the various bands from the mountains, and their gathering together in one vast agitated flood, be suggested and impressed upon the mind so forcibly as through music? Here the operatic composer had an oppor-

tunity, turned by Rossini to magnificent advantage, of going to the heart of a grand dramatic situation, and bringing out its full significance.

The trio, independently of its wonderful melodic and harmonic beauty, is a fine example of the power of music to give a simultaneous presentation of various and conflicting emotions. But on the mere beauty of the "Guillaume Tell" music, whether for the solo voices or for the orchestra, for the chorus or for the ballet, it would be vain to dwell. It would be useless to speak of it to those who have heard it—impossible to give any idea of it to those who have not.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSSINI AFTER "WILLIAM TELL."

THE reason why Rossini, after producing "Guillaume Tell," ceased finally to write for the stage is still a mystery, which has been rendered only more mysterious by the various and often contradictory explanations given of the composer's silence.

In the first place, the coldness with which "Guillaume Tell" was received, and the successive mutilations to which that work was subjected, are said to have checked Rossini's ardour.

Secondly, Rossini himself is reported to have declared that a new work, if successful, would not add to his reputation; while, unsuccessful, it might injure it.

Thirdly, Rossini has been accused of feeling annoyed at the success of Meyerbeer.

Fourthly, Rossini's forty years' abstinence from dramatic writing is explained by "laziness," as

though he had not written in the most industrious manner for the stage from the age of seventeen to that of thirty-seven, when, after taking six months to compose an opera (an age for Rossini), we suddenly find him abandoning dramatic composition for ever.

Some of these pretended explanations may be disposed of at once. As for Rossini's alleged jealousy of Meyerbeer, it must be remembered that Rossini was the means of bringing Meyerbeer to Paris; that the two composers were always excellent friends; and that one of Rossini's last productions, probably the very last composition he ever put to paper, was a pianoforte fantasia it pleased him to write on motives from "L'Africaine," after attending the last rehearsal of that work

As to the laziness with which Rossini is so often charged, it is curious to remark that this habit of mind or body, or both, was somehow compatible with the production of the thirty-four operas which Rossini wrote between the years 1810 and 1823. After he had settled in Paris, from 1824 to 1829, he still worked with prodigious activity, and did

not produce less than one opera every year,—"Il Viaggio a Reims" in 1825, "Le Siège de Corinthe" in 1826, "Moïse" in 1827, "Le Comte Ory" in 1828, and "Guillaume Tell" in 1829.

Rossini must at this time have been richer by some two or three thousand a year than when he was working in Italy, and that without counting his "author's rights" from the Opera, and reckoning only the capital of seven thousand pounds which he had brought back from London, the four hundred a year from his wife's dowry, the eight hundred a year which he received from the Civil List and the sums for which he sold his scores year by year to Troupenas, the publisher. One reason, then, for Rossini's inactivity may have been that one great stimulus to activity, poverty, urged him no longer.

But as Heine says of a composer whose friends had boasted that he was "not obliged to write,"—a windmill might as well say that it is not obliged to turn. If there is wind, it *must* turn; and when it ceases to turn, we know that the wind has gone down.

What makes the puzzle of Rossini's silence

puzzling indeed, is, that he does not seem quite to have known why he was silent himself. It is astonishing how many persons had the coolness, not to say impertinence, to ask Rossini why he never composed anything for the stage after "Guillaume Tell;" and it is amusing, though also provoking, to find that to most of these inquisitive persons he returned very evasive answers.

But, from Rossini's recorded conversations with his friend Ferdinand Hiller, it is evident that it was not one cause alone which made him determine to produce no more operas. It struck Hiller, with reference to the maestro's physical condition in the year 1854, that, "when a man has composed operas during twenty entire years, and been worshipped during five-and-forty, it is really not surprising that he should feel somewhat worn out." "But a nabob is a nabob," he continues, "even after losing two or three thousand thalers, and in the same manner Rossini's mind is still what it always was; his wit, his memory, his lively powers of narration, are undiminished. And as he has written nothing for twenty years, he has at least not given any one the right of asserting that his musical genius has deterio-

rated,—the last work he wrote was 'Guillaume Tell.'"

It was just at this time that Rossini exchanged some remarks with the Chevalier Neukomm on the subject of industry and idleness, which again throw a little light on the much vexed and certainly most interesting question of Rossini's prolonged silence. "You are still indefatigable," he observed to Neukomm.

"Whenever I am no longer able to work," replied the latter, "you may place me between six planks and nail me down, for I shall not desire to have anything more to do with life."

"You have a passion for industry; I always had a passion for idleness," exclaimed Rossini.

"The forty operas you have composed are not a proof of that," answered Neukomm.

"That was a long time ago. We ought to come into the world with packthread instead of nerves," said the maestro, somewhat seriously; "but let us drop the subject."

On several occasions Ferdinand Hiller seems to have asked Rossini point blank the great ques-

tion—why, after "William Tell," he ceased to write.

"Is it not one of the greatest of all wonders that you have not written anything for twenty-two years—what do you do with all the musical ideas which must be welling about in your brain?" asked Hiller, who was thinking perhaps of Heine's windmill.

"You are joking," replied the maestro, laughing.

"I am not joking in the least," returned Hiller; "how can you exist without composing?"

"What!" said Rossini, "would you have me without motive, without excitement, without a definite intention, write a definite work? I do not require much to be excited into composition, as my opera texts prove, but still, I do require something."

At another time Ferdinand Hiller succeeded in obtaining far more explicit reasons for Rossini's premature retirement, which neither the want of a libretto, nor the plea of constitutional idleness, nor shaken nerves, sufficed to explain.

"Had you not the intention," Hiller asked, "of composing an opera on the text of 'Faust?'"

"Yes," answered Rossini, "it was for a long period a favourite notion of mine, and I had already planned the whole scenarium with Jouy; it was naturally based upon Goethe's poem. At this time, however, there arose in Paris a regular "Faust" mania; every theatre had a particular "Faust" of its own, and this somewhat damped my ardour. Meanwhile, the Revolution of July had taken place; the Grand-Opera, previously a royal institution, passed into hands of a private person; my mother was dead, and my father found a residence in Paris unbearable, because he did not understand French —so I cancelled the agreement, which bound me by rights to send in four other grand operas, preferring to remain quietly in my native land, and enliven the last years of my old father's existence. I had been far away from my poor mother when she expired; this was an endless source of regret to me, and I was most apprehensive that the same thing might occur again in my father's case."

The choice of a subject afterwards looked upon as unsuitable, the Revolution of July, the appointment of a private person to the direction of the Opera, the desire of Rossini not to be separated from his

father in Italy during the last years of the old man's life—here is a whole catalogue of reasons given by Rossini himself for producing no more operas, in which we find no mention of the mutilation of "Guillaume Tell," nor of the composer's determination to rest on his laurels—a piece of conceit by no means in keeping with the character of Rossini, who, if he had had anything more to say would certainly not have been prevented from saying it by his own admiration for "Guillaume Tell."

Nor was there anything in the fate of "Guillaume Tell" to frighten him, and we have seen that his supposed laziness did not prevent his setting to work on a new opera, which he must have commenced immediately after "Guillaume Tell" had been produced.

Rossini went to live with his father in Bologna, it is true; but he did not go there until 1836, so that this could have had little influence in making him determine to send back his librettos six years before.

Rossini is neither a greater nor a smaller man, because, having produced thirty-nine operas when he was thirty-seven years of age, it did not, for no

matter what reason, suit him to complete the fortieth. He was destined to write thirty-nine operas, of which he wrote thirty-four during the first thirteen years of his career. Ferdinand Hiller was no doubt right in saying that a man cannot go on perpetually writing operas with impunity for twenty years—and such operas as Rossini's, and at such a rate of production! Even when he had become comparatively inactive, Rossini produced four operas at the Académie in four successive years. Meyerbeer, his immediate successor at the Académie, brought out no more than three works at that establishment, and one at the Opera Comique, in twenty years: ("Robert le Diable," 1831, "Les Huguenots," 1836, "Le Prophète," 1849, "L'Etoile du Nord," 1851).

Of course, a composer is finally to be judged by his works, and not by the time it takes him to produce them. I am only considering whether the excessive labours of Rossini in the midst of his alleged idleness may not, after twenty years' continuance, have thoroughly fatigued him.

No one seems to know what Rossini's precise

agreement with the Académie was. M. Castil-Blaze states that Rossini had engaged to write three operas, of which "Guillaume Tell" was the first. According to Ferdinand Hiller, he had undertaken to write four operas in addition to "Guillaume Tell;" and it is certain that immediately after "Guillaume Tell," he seriously meditated a "Faust." M. Castil-Blaze says positively that M. Scribe had, in execution of a contract, furnished to Rossini, and received back from him, the libretto of "Gustave III.," the foundation of one of Auber's greatest works, and the "Duc d'Albe," on which Donizetti was engaged when he was attacked by the terrible malady to which he succumbed.

Whatever influence the Revolution of 1830 may have exercised on Rossini's productive powers, it had a certain effect upon his pecuniary position. The Civil List of the dethroned king was abolished, and with it the pension of eight hundred a year, payable to Rossini. After going to law, the composer succeeded in getting a retiring pension of six thousand francs a year allowed him; and if one more reason for Rossini's abandoning dramatic composi-

tion be required, it may be looked for in the litigation to which he was now obliged to have recourse.

About this time, and in reference to the subject of this very lawsuit, Rossini had occasion to see M. Guizot, who, in his Memoirs has left a very interesting account of the interview. M. Guizot was not a dilettante, and judged Rossini as a man of the world. His general estimate of his visitor is perhaps for that reason all the more valuable; and the minister's statement as to Rossini's position with regard to the Civil List in the year 1830, must be accepted as unimpeachable.

"The same day," writes M. Guizot,* "M. Lenormant brought to breakfast with me M. Rossini, to whom the revolution of July had caused some annoyances, which I wished to make him forget. King Charles X. had treated him with well-merited favour; he was inspector-general of singing, and received, in addition to his author's rights, a salary of seven thousand francs; and some months previously, after the brilliant success of "Guillaume Tell," the Civil List had signed a treaty with him, by which

* "Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de mon Temps," vol. ii. p. 74.

he undertook to write two more great works for the French stage. I wished the new government to show him the same good will, and that he in return should give us the promised masterpieces. We talked freely, and I was struck by the animation and variety of his wit, open to all subjects, gay without vulgarity, and satirical without bitterness. He left me after half-an-hour's agreeable conversation, but which led to nothing; for it was not long before I resigned. I remained with my wife, whom M. Rossini's person and conversation had much interested. My little girl Henrietta, who was just beginning to walk and to chatter, was brought into the room. My wife went to the piano and played some passages from the master who had just left us, from 'Tancredi' among other works. We were alone; I passed I cannot say how long in this manner, forgetting all external occupations, listening to the piano, watching my little girl, who was trying to walk, perfectly tranquil and absorbed in contemplation of these objects of my affection. It is nearly thirty years since,—it seems as though it were yesterday. I am not of Dante's opinion,

'Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordasi tempo felice
Nella miseria.'

"A great happiness is, on the contrary, in my opinion, a light, the reflection of which extends to spaces which are no longer brightened by it. When God and time have appeased the violent uprisings of the soul against misfortune, it can still contemplate with pleasure in the past the charming things which it has lost."

CHAPTER IX.

THE "STABAT MATER."

ROSSINI, though he wrote no more for the stage, did not all at once cease to write. In 1832, a distinguished Spaniard, Don Varela, prevailed upon him to compose a "Stabat Mater," which was not intended to be made public. Rossini fell ill, and being unable to complete the work himself, got Tadolini to finish three of the pieces. Nine years afterwards, Don Varela being dead, his heirs sold the "Stabat" to a music publisher, when Rossini claimed at law the copyright of the work, and gained his action. He now composed three pieces to replace those of Tadolini, and sold his "Stabat" thus complete to Troupenas.

Rossini had previously retired to Bologna, where he discovered the talent of Alboni, then a young girl, and taught her, very carefully, all the great contralto parts in his operas. He also allowed

himself to be appointed honorary director of the Lyceum of Bologna, where the duties he assumed were by no means nominal. He took a great interest in the institution, as the school in which he had received his own education, and did all he could to improve it during a residence at Bologna of some dozen years. It amused him, he said, to hear the pupils, who formed a complete orchestra, play all possible kinds of orchestral works.

In the summer of 1836, Rossini paid a short visit to Frankfort, where he met Mendelssohn, and passed several days in his society.

"I had the pleasure," says Ferdinand Hiller, "of seeing almost daily in my father's house the two men, one of whom had written his last, the other, his first great work. The winning manners of the celebrated maestro captivated Mendelssohn, as they did everyone else; and Mendelssohn played for him as long, and as much as he wished, both his own compositions and those of others. Rossini thought of those days with great interest, and often turned the conversation to the master who was so soon torn from us. He informed us that he had heard his 'Ottetto' very well executed in Florence,

and I was obliged to play for him, four-handed, the symphony in A minor with Madame Pfeiffer, a very excellent pianist from Paris, who was then stopping at Trouville."

Between Rossini's visit to Frankfort and visit to Trouville, an interval of eighteen years had elapsed, during which Rossini lost his first wife (1845) and married again (Madame Olympe Pelissier, 1847).

Duprez had now appeared with the most brilliant success in "Guillaume Tell;" but the enthusiastic admiration which Rossini's admirable dramatic music at last elicited, in no way shook his determination never to write again for the stage.

The "Stabat Mater" too, performed in public for the first time in 1842, had increased the composer's reputation by exhibiting his genius in a new light. Some critics, it is true, complained that the music was not sufficiently devotional, that it was terrestrial, theatrical, essentially operatic in its character.

Rossini told Ferdinand Hiller, that he had written the "Stabat Mater" mezzo serio; but

perhaps Rossini was only mezzo serio himself in saying so.

Much nonsense has been written about this very beautiful work, which, on its first production, was severely though clumsily handled in several quarters, from a parochial point of view. Its lovely melodies are indeed admirably unlike the music of the psalms sung in our churches; there is also a little more naiveté, a little more inspiration, in the poetry of the "Stabat Mater" than in the tortured prose, measured into lengths, after the fashion of Procrustes, which certain poetical firms have arranged, in pretended imitation of David, for the use of our Protestant congregations. The poem of the "Stabat Mater" is full of beauty and tenderness; and even in the passages most terrible by their subject, the versification never loses its melody and its grace. Whatever else may be said of Rossini's "Stabat," it cannot be maintained that it is not in harmony with the stanzas to which it is set.

Besides the "Stabat Mater" was composed, as Raphael's Virgins were painted, for the Roman Catholic Church, which at once accepted it, without

ever suspecting that Rossini's music was not religious in character.

Doubtless the music of the "Stabat" bears a certain resemblance to Rossini's operatic music; but that only means that the composer, in whatever style he may write, still preserves something of his individuality. The resemblance between Handel's opera music and oratorio music is far greater, and, indeed, in the case of some airs, amounts, as nearly as possible, to identity. At least, in Rossini's "Stabat Mater," there are no bravura airs. The style throughout is simple, fervent, sincere.

"The 'Stabat' of Rossini," wrote Heine to the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, in 1842, "has been the great event of the season. The discussion of this masterpiece is still the order of the day, and the very reproaches which, from the North German point of view, are directed against the great maestro, attest in a striking manner the originality and depth of his genius; 'the execution is too mundane, too sensual, too gay for this ideal subject. It is too light, too agreeable, too amusing.' Such are the grievous complaints of some dull and tedious critics who, if they do not designedly affect an outrageous

spiritualism, have at least appropriated to themselves by barren studies very circumscribed and very erroneous notions on the subject of sacred music. As among the painters, so among the musicians, there is an entirely false idea as to the proper manner of treating religious subjects. Painters think, that in truly Christian subjects, the figures must be represented with cramped, narrow contours, and in forms as bleached and colourless as possible; the drawings of Overbeck are their prototype in this respect. To contradict this infatuation by a fact, I bring forward the religious pictures of the Spanish school, remarkable for the fulness of the contours, the brightness of the colouring, and yet no one will deny that these Spanish paintings breathe the most spiritualised, the most ideal Christianity; and that their authors were not less imbued with faith than the celebrated masters of our days, who have embraced Catholicism at Rome in order to be able to paint its sacred symbols with a fervour and ingenuous spontaneity which, according to their idea, only the ecstasy of faith can give. The true character of Christian art does not reside in thinness and paleness of the body, but in a certain effer-

vescence of the soul, which neither the musician nor the painter can appropriate to himself either by baptism or by study; and in this respect I find in the 'Stabat' of Rossini a more truly Christian character than in the 'Paulus' of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, an oratorio which the adversaries of Rossini point to as a model of the Christian style. Heaven preserve me from wishing to express by that the least blame against a master so full of merits as the composer of 'Paulus;' and the author of these letters is less likely than any one to wish to criticise the Christian character of the oratorio in question from clerical, or, so to say, pharisaical reasons. I cannot, however, avoid pointing out, that at the age when Mendelssohn commenced Christianity at Berlin (he was only baptised in his thirteenth year), Rossini had already deserted it a little, and had lost himself entirely in the mundane music of operas. Now he has again abandoned the latter, to carry himself back in dreams to the Catholic recollections of his first youth—to the days when he sang as a child in the choir of the Pesaro cathedral, and took part as an acolyte in the service of the holy mass."

Heine, in his brilliant article, goes on to exalt Rossini (according to his invariable method) by depreciating Mendelssohn; a proceeding for which Rossini would not have thanked him. Nor would Heine himself have been pleased to see the criticism in which he expresses so poetically, and in such an admirable form, the true character of the "Stabat" music, represented by a mere fragment. Still the fragments of some writers are better than the complete articles of others; and the passages in which Heine, as a poetical appreciator, not as a musical critic, points out the error of condemning Rossini's entrancing music from the gloomy churchwarden point of view, are admirable.

The "Stabat Mater," was, at one time, regarded as Rossini's final utterance; but a mass, the production of the last few years of his life, has just been made public, and bids fair to eclipse the fame of the earlier religious work. However, of the "Stabat" it may already be said that the music, as music, whatever significance may be attached to it, will certainly live. It gains every year in popularity, and is at this moment better

known than any of Rossini's operas, except "William Tell" and the "Barber."

The "Messe Solennelle" (or "*Petite* Messe Solennelle," its original title) was performed for the first time in presence of Meyerbeer, Auber, and a certain number of private friends at Paris, in the year 1864. The composer had not at that time arranged it for the orchestra, and the instrumentation of the mass occupied him at intervals almost until the autumn of last year, when, at the age of seventy-seven, he was attacked by the illness which carried him off.

Rossini had the happiness not to survive his capacity for production,—far less his reputation, which the performance throughout Europe of his last work cannot fail to enhance. He was surrounded to the last by admiring and affectionate friends; and if it be true that, like so many other Italians, he regarded Friday as an unlucky day, and thirteen as an unlucky number, it is remarkable that on Friday, the 13th of November, he died.

Incomparably the greatest Italian composer of the century, and the greatest of all Italian composers for the stage, he will be known until some very

great change takes place in our artistic civilisation by at least three great works in three very different styles—"Il Barbiere di Siviglia," a comic opera of the year 1813, "Guillaume Tell," a serious opera of the year 1829, and the "Stabat Mater," a religious poem of the year 1841.

LIST OF ROSSINI'S WORKS,

WITH THE DATE OF THEIR PRODUCTION IN PUBLIC.

1. Il Pianto d'Armonia. Cantata, 1808.
2. Orchestral Symphony, 1809.
3. Quartet for Stringed Instruments, 1809.
4. La Cambiale di Matrimonio. Opera, 1810.
5. L'Equivoco Stravagante. Opera, 1811.
6. Didone Abbandonata. Cantata, 1811.
7. Demetrio e Polibio. Opera, 1811.
8. L'Inganno Felice. Opera, 1812.
9. Ciro in Babilonia. Opera, 1812.
10. La Scala di Seta. Opera, 1812.
11. La Pietra del Paragone. Opera, 1812.
12. L'Occasione fa il Ladro. Opera, 1812.
13. Il Figlio per Azzardo. Opera, 1813.
14. Tancredi. Opera, 1813.
15. L'Italiana in Algeri. Opera, 1813.
16. L'Aureliano in Palmira. Opera, 1814.
17. Egle e Irene. Cantata (unpublished), 1814.
18. Il Turco in Italia. Opera, 1814.
19. Elisabetta. Opera, 1815.
20. Torvaldo e Dorliska. Opera, 1816.
21. Il Barbiere di Siviglia. Opera, 1816.
22. La Gazetta. Opera, 1816.
23. Otello. Opera, 1816.
24. Teti e Peleo. Cantata, 1816.
25. Cenerentola. Opera, 1817.
26. La Gazza Ladra. Opera, 1817.
27. Armide. Opera, 1817.
28. Adelaide di Borgogna. Opera, 1818.
29. Mosè. Opera, 1818.
30. Adina. Opera (written for Lisbon), 1818.

31. Ricciardo e Zoraïde. Opera, 1818.
32. Ermione. Opera, 1819.
33. Eduardo e Cristina. Opera, 1819.
34. La Donna del Lago. Opera, 1819.
35. Cantata in honour of the King of Naples. 1819.
36. Bianca e Faliero. Opera, 1820.
37. Maometto II. Opera, 1820.
38. Cantata in honour of the Emperor of Austria. 1820.
39. Matilda di Sabran. Opera, 1821.
40. La Riconoscenza. Cantata, 1821.
41. Zelmira. Opera, 1822.
42. Il Vero Omaggio. Cantata, 1822.
43. Semiramide. Opera, 1823.
44. Il Viaggio a Reims. Opera, 1825.
45. Le Siége de Corinthe. Opera, 1826.
46. Moïse. Opera, 1827.
47. Le Comte Ory. Opera, 1828.
48. Guillaume Tell. Opera, 1829.
49. Les Soirées Musicales. Douze morceaux de chant, 1840.
50. Quatre Ariettes Italiennes, 1841.
51. Stabat Mater. 1842.
52. La Foi, l'Espérance et la Charité. Trois chœurs, 1843.
53. Stances à Pie IX., 1847.
54. Messe Solennelle, 1869.

THE END.

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